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NEARBY

Delhi's air quality in 'severe' category again
 NEW DELHI
 The air quality of Delhi breached the "severe" category again on Wednesday. It is, however, likely to improve on Thursday and Friday, according to government-run monitoring agency SAFAR. The average level of PM2.5 was 265.5 ug/m3, more than four times the safe limit of 60 ug/m3 as per Indian standards in Delhi and NCR at 9 p.m., according to CPCB.
CITY PAGE 3

After a heated debate, RS clears Citizenship Bill

AIADMK, Janata Dal (U) and BJD played a key role in helping push Bill through

VIJAYA SINGH DAMINI NATH NEW DELHI
 The Rajya Sabha on Wednesday passed the contentious Citizenship (Amendment) Bill (CAB), 2019, with 125 votes in favour and 99 against. The current strength of the Upper House is 240.

The Bill amends the Citizenship Act, 1955, and for the first time, will grant citizenship on the basis of religion to non-Muslim communities from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan, who entered India on or before December 31, 2014. It was passed by the Lok Sabha on Monday.

The debate saw fiery exchanges, with Opposition members accusing the government of violating the provisions of the Constitution. The Opposition also added that the legislation could be challenged on legal grounds. Several members also flagged the violent protests against the Bill in Assam and Tripura.

Replying to the debate, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said, "The Bill has no provision to snatch citizenship from anyone but to grant citizenship to the refugees. There is no need for Indian Muslims to live in fear. India has given respect to its Muslim population. This Bill does not discriminate against them. India will never be Muslim *mukt* (free)."

Today marks a dark day in the constitutional history of India. Passage of the CAB marks the victory of narrow-minded and bigoted forces over India's pluralism
SONIA GANDHI Congress leader

This (bill) is a slap on the face of Parliament
P. CHIDAMBARAM Congress leader

We don't need any certificate to prove how patriotic we are and how staunchly Hindu we are. We are the headmaster of the school where you study
SANJAY RAUT, Shiv Sena

We are opposing it as the preamble of the Constitution, which states everyone should be treated equal, has been compromised. The soul of our Constitution is secularism
SATISH CHANDRA MISRA, BSP leader

This Bill should be thrown into the Bay of Bengal
VAIKO, MDMK leader
 Citizenship Bill is not to snatch anyone's Indian citizenship. Muslims have no need to fear or worry
AMIT SHAH Union Home Minister

He said Muslims need not worry. However, he added, "...If you expect that Muslims from all over the world would be accommodated here, then you are mistaken. This country will not function like this."

FULL COVERAGE: PAGE 6, 13

He said he was mindful of the concerns of people in the Northeast, and all the (Hindu Bengalis) refugees from the then East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) who came to West Bengal will be given citizenship.

The votes of the AIADMK, the Janata Dal (United) and the Biju Janata Dal were key in helping the BJP-led government push the Bill through in the Upper House. Members of former BJP ally

Shiv Sena participated in the debate but did not vote. Two MPs of the Nationalist Congress Party and the Bahujan Samaj Party were absent.

Claims on numbers
 Mr. Shah said "lakhs and crores" of people would benefit from the Bill. However, he did not explain how he had arrived at the numbers.

Derek O'Brien of the Trinamool Congress mentioned that the Director of the Intelligence Bureau had said in a report that around 31,000 people would be the immediate beneficiaries.

Leader of the Opposition Ghulam Nabi Azad said the government did not have authentic records on the number of persecuted people from the three countries.

"While the Home Minister has been counting crores and lakhs of people...so far only 4,400 people have cited religious persecution as grounds to get citizenship," Mr. Azad said.

The Congress's Kapil Sibal asked how the government would differentiate between illegal migrants and those persecuted on religious grounds.

He said the government was forcing people to lie that they had come from Bangladesh as they always claimed they are Indians.

To this, Mr. Shah said, "If you ask someone if they are illegal, they will say 'No'. But we will tell them that you will be granted citizenship from the date you entered."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

Army deployed in Assam, Tripura as violence spreads

RAHUL KARMAKAR GUWAHATI/ AGARTALA
 The Army was deployed in Guwahati, Tinsukia and Dibrugarh in Assam and in Kanchanpur and Manu areas of Tripura on Wednesday as protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2019, continued for the second day.

Another column, requisitioned in western Assam's Bongaigaon district, has been put on standby and the paramilitary Assam Rifles have been deployed in the Ananda Bazar area of Kanchanpur, where the situation remained tense following Tuesday's protests.

Army PRO Lt. Col. P. Khongsai said two Army columns have been deployed in Guwahati city and are carrying out flag marches.

As the debate on the Bill commenced in the Rajya Sabha, a relatively quiet morning was shattered by violent clashes across Assam's Brahmaputra Valley, including capital Guwahati.

Railway stations set afire
 A railway station in Dibrugarh's Chabua, the hometown of Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal, was set on fire by protesters late at night. The Panitola railway



Raging protests: College students taking out a rally against the Bill in Guwahati on Wednesday. •RITU RAJ KONWAR

station in Tinsukia district was also torched, a North-east Frontier Railway spokesperson said. The house of Union Minister Rameswar Teli in Dulaijan was attacked by protesters and properties damaged.

Curfew imposed
 The State government imposed curfew in Guwahati from 6 p.m. "till further notice". Mobile Internet and data services were suspended for 24 hours in 10 districts of the Valley, including Kamrup (Metro), Dibrugarh, and Tinsukia. Internet services were already suspended across Tripura for 48 hours from 2 p.m. on Tuesday.

Though no party or student body had called a shutdown, protesters, a majority of them students, fought pitched battles with security forces at several places, including near the secretariat. Unlike Tuesday, when people responded to a shutdown called by the North East Students' Organisation, hundreds of people poured onto the streets across the State, protesting against the CAB. The protests soon went out of control as vehicles and public structures were vandalised or set on fire. Police resorted to baton charges and firing of teargas.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

CII award for The Hindu

THG Publishing Pvt Ltd (The Hindu Group of Publications), received the CII Award for Customer Obsession 2019 for "Recognition for Active Customer Engagement" and "Special Recognition: Leveraging Digital Technologies for Superior Customer Experience", in New Delhi.
PAGE 9

Centre claims issue resolved, JNUSU says not yet

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

The Centre claimed to have brokered a deal between the administration and agitating students of Jawaharlal Nehru University on Wednesday night to end the ongoing stand-off regarding hostel fee hike.

The JNU Students' Union, however, said there is no agreement as yet. It asked the students not to be affected by rumours and said the movement would continue until their demands are met.

The Ministry of Human Resource Development has been holding talks with the students for the last two days in a bid to end the dispute which has led to mass street protests, police action and a threat to boycott examinations.
DETAILS ON PAGE 2

2002 riots: Modi gets clean chit from Nanavati-Mehta panel

Report tabled in Gujarat Assembly five years after submission

MAHESH LANGA AHMEDABAD

The Nanavati-Mehta Commission on Wednesday gave a clean chit to Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the 2002 Gujarat riots, in which more than 1,000 people were massacred across the State after a train compartment was torched by a mob, killing 59 pilgrims returning from Ayodhya.

The Commission's report was tabled in the Legislative Assembly by Minister of State for Home Pradeepsinh Jadeja, five years after it was submitted to the then government.

The Commission also absolved the State administration, Ministers and police officers of any complicity, direct or in direct, and also ruled out any conspiracy to organise the large-scale riots. It refused to call the



Narendra Modi

riots a result of any "pre-planned conspiracy" or "orchestrated violence".

"There is no evidence to show that these attacks were either inspired or instigated or abated by any Minister of the State," the Commission said in its report, which runs to over 1,500 pages and is compiled in nine volumes.

However, the panel, comprising former Supreme Court judge G.T. Na-

navati and former Gujarat High Court Judge Justice Akshay Mehta, observed in the report that police at some places were "ineffective in controlling the mob because of their inadequate numbers or because they were not properly armed."

On the riots in Ahmedabad city, where a former parliamentarian was among those killed by the rioters, it held that "The police had not shown their competence and eagerness which was necessary" to control the mob violence.

It said, "On an overall consideration of the entire material, the commission finds that the communal riots which followed the Godhra incident were really by way of an aftermath of those incidents." The panel blamed the Godhara train-burning as the trigger for the riots.

Put all courts on high alert in J&K, Ladakh, demand judges

Chief Justice wants CRPF security for courts in wake of threats

PEERZADA ASHIQ SRINAGAR

Jammu & Kashmir High Court Chief Justice Gita Mittal and Judge Rajesh Bindal on Wednesday sought upgradation of security on all court premises in the Union Territories (UTs) of J&K and Ladakh, including district courts, in the wake of threats from militants and strike calls by lawyers.

The judges also asserted that "the J&K police were unable to control the situation and need to be replaced by the Central Reserve Police Force".

Suo motu cognisance
 Taking suo motu cognisance of the current security apparatus at the courts, including in the twin High Court complexes of Srinagar and Jammu, Justices Mittal and Bindal observed: "Earlier order

of the Ministry of Home Affairs dated May 31, 2007, has not been paid any heed in J&K. As per these guidelines, the High Courts had to be declared high-security zones."

The judges issued fresh notices to Commissioner Secretary, Department of Home in J&K, and Union Home Ministry "to declare the High Court of Jammu & Kashmir and district courts as high-security zones".

Censuring the local police, the judges suggested they were experiencing "an unusual and very serious situation". "It's manifest that the local police are unable to manage the situation and should be replaced by CRPF... To our utter chagrin and dismay, the local police are either reluctant to engage with the lawyers or not able to control the situation," the judges noted, while referring

to the strike call and hindrances created by Jammu-based lawyers in the past one month over the issue of creation of a new wing to register revenue records.

Referring to threatening posters by militants that appeared in the court complex in Srinagar after August 5, the judges observed, "On September 7, posters threatening suicide attacks on the judiciary were pasted with impunity in the Srinagar court complex."

"Urgent steps need to be taken to ensure security of all courts in the UTs. Equally imperative is the assurance of free access to courts for all citizens at all times," the judges underlined.

Separately, the court issued a show-cause notice to striking lawyers in Jammu, saying: "Obstructing access to court is unpardonable."

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday said it intended to appoint a retired judge to enquire into the extra-judicial killing of four men accused of the rape and murder of a veterinarian in Hyderabad.

"We know that the Telangana High Court is already seized of the case. We have only entertained this case to appoint a retired Supreme Court judge to enquire into encounter. He will do so from Delhi," Chief Justice of India Sharad A. Bobde remarked as the hearing began.

Senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, for Telangana, said the State was already complying with the SC's 16 guidelines in cases of police encounters as per the PUCL judgment of 2014.

EX-JUDGE SAYS NO PAGE 8

50th PSLV launch carries radar satellite

RISAT-2BRI will be used for national security

T.K. ROHIT SRIHARIKOTA

India's Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) marked its 'Golden Jubilee' launch on Wednesday by injecting India's advanced radar imaging satellite RISAT-2BRI and nine other customer satellites from Japan, Italy, Israel and the U.S. into their intended orbits.

The PSLV, which has a history of successful launches of payloads that include Chandrayaan-1, Mars Orbiter Mission and the space recovery mission, soared into clear blue skies at 3.25 p.m. from the refurbished first launchpad, marking the 50th launch for the vehicle.



New horizons: ISRO's PSLV lifts off from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota on Wednesday. •B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

toric mission," ISRO Chairman K. Sivan said from Mission Control after the successful launch.

"We also achieved a major milestone of 75 launches from our spaceport today. Initially, the PSLV had a carrying capacity of 850 kg, and over the years it has been enhanced to 1.9 tonnes. The PSLV is very versatile, having

various mission options," Mr. Sivan said.

The PSLV had helped take payloads into almost all the orbits in space, including the Geo-Stationary Transfer Orbit (GTO), the moon and mars, and would soon be launching a mission to the Sun, the ISRO chief noted.

Mr. Sivan observed that in the last 26 years, the PSLV

had lifted more than 52 tonnes into space, of which about 17% were for commercial customers. He also released a book commemorating the 50 launches and the scientists involved in them.

The PSLV has failed only twice - the maiden flight of the PSLV D1 in September 1993 and the PSLV C-39 in August 2017.

S. Somanath, Director, Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre, said while it had taken ISRO 26 years to achieve 50 launches, the next 50 would likely be done in the coming five years.

RISAT-2BRI will be used for agriculture, forestry, disaster management support and national security.

ISRO will launch the next version of RISAT within the next two months, said P. Kunhikrishnan, Director, U.R. Rao Satellite Centre.

'I will fulfil my childhood friend's last wish'

Monu, friend of Anaj Mandi fire victim Musharraf, promises to take care of his family

SAURABH TRIVEDI NEW DELHI

After nearly two decades, life has come full circle for Monu Agarwal, the friend Anaj Mandi fire victim Musharraf Ali made his last call to. "My last conversation with Musharraf is still echoing in my ears. He knew he would not survive the fire. He requested me to take care of his family. As his childhood friend and neighbour, I will fulfil his last wish," said Mr. Agarwal.



Monu Agarwal (left) with Musharraf during their visit to a temple in Kotdwar last year. •SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Musharraf, a resident of Tanda Maidas village in Bijnor district of Uttar Pradesh, was among the 43 workers who died in the fire tragedy in Delhi on Sunday. He was buried in the village on Tuesday.

"When I was eight years old, I lost my father. Musharraf's father and other families in the area came forward to help us with food and other basic necessities. I can understand his family's pain now," said Mr. Agarwal, who owns a utensils shop in the village.

His friendship with Musharraf remained strong even after the latter moved to Delhi for work in 2007, said Mr. Agarwal. "One can understand the depth of our friendship from our last conversation. Musharraf was in extreme distress when he called me. After the call got disconnected, I tried to call back but no one responded. I thought he might have fallen unconscious and the firefighters must have rescued him," he said.

Hope for relief
 Mr. Agarwal said he did not inform Musharraf's family about the call immediately. "After the call, I and two distant relatives of Musharraf left for Delhi. On reaching Anaj Mandi, we were asked to go to LNJP Hospital where we found his name in the list of casualties. I broke down

and asked my family members to immediately go to Musharraf's house and inform his family," Mr. Agarwal said, adding that his deceased friend was a dedicated family man who took care of his mother, wife and four small children with his small salary of ₹10,000 per month. He hoped that like the Bihar government, the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister will also announce some ex gratia relief for the families of the fire victims from the State.

Recalling Musharraf's visit to the village last year, Mr. Agarwal said they and two other friends went on a short trip to a temple in Kotdwar. "Musharraf came to the village recently on a week-long vacation. He left for Delhi on Friday. On Sunday, the tragedy took place," he said.

Timings
DELHI

THURSDAY, DEC. 12
RISE 07:04 SET 17:26
RISE 17:41 SET 06:54

FRIDAY, DEC. 13
RISE 07:05 SET 17:26
RISE 18:34 SET 07:55

SATURDAY, DEC. 14
RISE 07:05 SET 17:26
RISE 19:33 SET 08:54

Delhi Weather

	max	min
Delhi City	23	08
Safdarjang	23	08
Palam	23	09

Delhi Palam Today
19°C Rain and thundershowers are likely over the region. Isolated hailstorm activities may prevail over the area.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow
18°C Rain and thundershowers are likely to continue upto afternoon. A cool day is likely to prevail.

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Air quality of Delhi-NCR

City	Index	Category
Delhi	408	Poor
Gurgaon	370	Poor
Ghaziabad	441	Very poor
Faridabad	390	Poor
Noida	426	Very poor
Greater Noida	449	Very poor

Legend:
Good (0-50), Satisfactory (51-100), Moderate (101-200), Poor (201-300), Very poor (301-400), Severe (>401)

AIR QUALITY INDEX AT 4 P.M. YESTERDAY (AVERAGE OF PAST 24 HOURS) | SOURCE: CPCB

Centre claims agreement to end JNU stand-off; no deal yet: students

HRD Ministry says hostel hikes remain, BPL students to get 50% concession

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI
The Centre claimed to have brokered a deal between the administration and the students of the Jawaharlal Nehru University on Wednesday night to end the ongoing stand-off regarding a hike in hostel fees.

However, the JNU Students' Union said there is no agreement as yet. It also asked students not to be affected by rumours of an agreement and said the movement would continue until their demands were met.

The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) has been holding talks with the students for the last two days in a bid to end the dispute which has led to mass street protests, police action and a threatened boycott of

examinations which are due to begin on Thursday. On Wednesday night, the Ministry circulated a document recording the discussions, stating that agreements have been reached to ensure that normality returns to the campus.

Utility charges
The document stated that the monthly room rent hikes – ₹10 to ₹300 for a shared room and ₹20 to ₹600 for a single room – will remain. The students from below poverty line families will get a 50% concession. However, the newly imposed service and utility charges of approximately ₹2,000 per month will be rolled back with the costs to be borne by the University Grants Commission. This fee structure change will be ratified in an inter-hostel admi-

nistration meeting, the document read.

It also said students will call off the agitation while the administration will take a "lenient view" of incidents that have occurred since the protest began almost two months ago. An earlier compromise formula from MHRD on Saturday had proposed that the JNU administration would withdraw all cases against the students. In order to compensate for the lost academic period, the Academic Council will be requested to consider and give relaxation upto two weeks, said the MHRD document. It added that the Delhi High Court orders regarding notification of JNUSU would be followed. "Not only shall the campus return to normalcy immediately but a fool-proof system shall be put in place for non-recurrence of

such issues in future," said the document.

A senior official said while JNUSU representatives had agreed to all the decisions in the document, it had still to be passed by the union's general body. The JNUSU said it refused that it had agreed to the "draft" being circulated.

The union said while it was meeting the MHRD and having a dialogue, after patiently putting forward the demands, the administration was doing its best to disrupt peaceful talks. It alleged that some students who were in support of the administration have started attacking those who were against the fee hike. "As this movement has shown, the JNU students will continue to resist in the most democratic manner, in spite of all provocations and acts of violence," the JNUSU said.

High Court directs police to provide security to university V-C, Registrar

JNU seeks contempt action against students, police

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday asked the police to provide security and assistance to Jawaharlal Nehru University's administrative staff, including the Vice-Chancellor and the Registrar, to enable them to enter the main office building, access to which has been blocked by protesters.

Justice Pratibha M. Singh passed the order after the court was informed that the Registrar has been unable to enter the administrative block due to the protest by the students. The court was informed about the situation while hearing a sexual harassment case involving two professors.

Central government Standing Counsel Monika Arora told the court that there was a High Court or-

der of August 2017 directing the students to protest 100 metres away from the administrative block.

The students were also told not to block access to the building. Ms. Arora said as per the order, the police could intervene if the students did not comply with it.

Delhi government Standing Counsel (Criminal) Rahul Mehra, who appeared for the police, said the agency would comply with the court orders and suggested that the university talk to the students to resolve the issue.

Violated court's order
In a separate application, the JNU has moved the High Court seeking contempt action against its students and the police for allegedly violating the court order bar-

ring protests within 100 metres of the administrative block.

The university said the students violated the court's August 9, 2017, order.

Also, it alleged that day-to-day working has been disrupted since October 28.

It has also claimed that the police also violated the order by refusing and failing to take action to maintain law and order in the university and remove the blockade around the administrative block. The petition has contended that repeated efforts made by JNU officials to enter the administrative block to perform their duties failed as the agitating students turned violent.

The fresh plea for contempt action against the students and police is likely to be listed for hearing on Friday.

Loud and clear



Women from Northeast, residing in the Capital, during a protest against the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill at Jantar Mantar on Wednesday. • SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

Cong. protests CAB, calls it gross violation of Constitution

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Delhi Congress on Wednesday organised a protest march outside the BJP headquarters on DDU Marg against the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, demanding its withdrawal. It termed the Bill a "gross violation of the Constitution".

Delhi Congress chief Subhash Chopra said the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill passed in the Lok Sabha was a direct attack on the Constitution.

"The power-drunk BJP was insulting the Constitution which will create division and an explosive-like situation in the country. This Bill has set a wrong precedent and raised a question mark on the standing of the country before the world," Mr. Chopra said, adding that those who are endorsing the Bill are trying to weaken the secular and democratic fabric of the country.

"This Bill was totally unconstitutional and this is why the Congress workers have come to oppose it," he said. AICC general secretary in-charge of Delhi P.C. Chacko appealed to the workers to be prepared for a sustained fight on this issue.

Delhi University teachers protest outside V-C office

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Several Delhi University teachers, who are on indefinite strike since last week, held torchlight demonstrations in front of the Vice-Chancellor's office on Wednesday, demanding absorption of ad hoc teachers.

"The inhuman and exploitative conditions under which ad hoc teachers have

been forced to work for many years, including the denial of minimum employee rights like maternity leave can only be mitigated through absorption," the Delhi University Teachers' Association (DUTA) said.

Up to 4,500 such teachers claim to have faced uncertainty over their employment on multiple occasions. Recently a circular by the

V-C, calling for the appointment of guest teachers in vacancies arising in the current academic session, had led to massive protests with teachers occupying his office, demanding its withdrawal.

The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) acceded to the union's demands, including others like amendments to

appointment regulations to allow ad hoc teachers to appear for interviews to permanent positions. However, the union said their demand for one-time absorption has not been fulfilled.

The DUTA urged the MHRD and the V-C to find a solution to "mitigate the hardship and suffering of thousands of young teachers".

Congress, Left parties oppose electoral bonds, say it distorts political scenario

'New rules under RTI Amendment Act will dilute RTI Act'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

While warning that electoral bonds encourage crony capitalism and distort the political playing field, the Congress and both major Left parties vowed to continue opposing the scheme during a Jan Manch or people's gathering organised by the National Campaign for People's Right to Information on Wednesday.

Congress MP Rajeev Gowda pointed out that while the BJP had claimed that donors would remain anonymous under the scheme, information accessed by RTI activists showed that the government can track details through SBI (the state-owned issuing bank) and the serial number on the bonds. It's not surpris-

ing that the BJP has been the biggest beneficiary, with 90% of known donations, he said, demanding that the scheme be scrapped and the names of all donors released into the public domain.

Yechury files plea in SC
The electoral bonds scheme encourage crony capitalism, said Communist Party of India (Marxist) leader Sitaram Yechury, noting that he has filed a petition in the Supreme Court seeking abolition of the scheme. Communist Party of India leader D. Raja said that schemes like the electoral bonds were completely skewing the political scenario, adding that the challenge ahead is to fight money power in politics.

Free and fair elections can-

not be ensured without ensuring a level playing field amongst parties in terms of resources and funding, he said. The political leaders also opposed the new rules under the recently enacted RTI Amendment Act, saying that it would dilute the RTI Act. Delhi residents at the Jan Manch spoke about how the government put them through hardships during demonetisation in the name of fighting corruption even while pushing electoral bonds which is an instrument for money laundering. When the government wants citizens to account for their income and switch to digital payments, why are political parties not disclosing details of who is funding them, asked a resident.

BJYM protests against 'false claims by govt'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The BJP Yuva Morcha on Wednesday protested at Sangam Vihar against what it alleged were "false claims" made by the Delhi government regarding

education, employment, women safety, clean water under the campaign – AAP Ke Paap, Dilli Ka Yuva Bolega, Kejriwal ki Pol Kholega.

The protest was led by BJP Yuva Morcha president

Sunil Yadav. "Delhi has not developed since the AAP government came to power..." Mr. Yadav alleged.

The BJYM on Thursday will hold similar protests at the North Campus in Delhi University.

IN BRIEF



Leaders from BJP and Congress join AAP

NEW DELHI
Several leaders from Delhi BJP and Congress, including vice president of BJP's women's wing, joined AAP, the party said on Wednesday. All the leaders took AAP membership in the presence of senior party leaders Rajendra Pal Gautam, Dilip Pandey and Durgesh Pathak. "Prominent leaders who have joined AAP are: Brijesh Kumar Sharma (former Congress leader), Shikha Trivedi (former councillor, Congress), Shivkumari Tiwari (vice president, Mahila Morcha of Delhi BJP) and Subhash Chandra Mishra (delegate, district Congress)," an official statement said.

Correction

A report in *The Hindu's* edition dated December 10, 2019, stated: 'HC nod for linking social media accounts with Aadhaar'. The High Court had declined to order linking of social media accounts with Aadhaar. The error is regretted.

Correction

A report in *The Hindu's* edition dated December 3, 2019, stated: 'After new MV Act, fatal accidents see 300% dip'. A reduction in fatal accidents from 974 to 246 works out to around 75%. The error is regretted.

Fearing action, owners of illegal units shifting at night

Move comes after verification drive begins at Anaj Mandi

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Days after a massive fire ripped through a four-storey building housing illegal manufacturing units at Anaj Mandi, owners of the illegal manufacturing units in the area are moving out at midnight fearing action from civic agencies. The fire had claimed 43 lives.

A police officer said that owners of illegal units operating from residential premises have started moving out after a joint team of MCD, BSES, police and district administration kicked off a verification drive in the area.

"We have arrested Suhail, brother-in-law of the building owner Rehan. Suhail also owns two units in the building. A total of 18 manufacturing units were operating from the building. Imran, brother of Rehan is absconding. He will be arrested soon," said the officer.

During investigation, it was found that a total of seven commercial electricity meters were installed in the building. The top two floors of the building were constructed illegally.

"We have recovered hard disks of CCTVs installed in each floor of the building for investigation. Except for one hard disk, all other disks got



A fire at a building housing illegal manufacturing units at Anaj Mandi claimed 43 lives on Sunday. • FILE PHOTO: SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

damaged in the fire. It has been sent to forensic science laboratory to retrieve data," the officer added.

Sealing drive

Meanwhile, the North Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC) on Wednesday wrote a letter to the Delhi police seeking security assistance while carrying out sealing drive in Sadar Bazar and Paharganj area.

On Wednesday, a team from the North body surveyed Sadar Bazar and Paharganj areas and ordered shutdown of 45 units operating illegally. "We have closed 45 units, four units were sealed and show cause notices were issued to 23 units operating in the area. The team faced resistance in Karol Bagh but managed with the help of police. North bo-

dy will conduct similar drives in other areas falling under its jurisdiction," said a senior officer with North body.

A team of senior officers from BSES also surveyed the building in Anaj Mandi where the fire broke out on Sunday. "We have cut off power supply to two buildings for violating norms. A major drive has been ordered across the city to stop misuse of power connection," added the officer.

The police officer said that the accused Rehan and his manager Furkan allegedly told the police that to operate from the building, they reached out to all the authorities concerned, including police, through a local man. Every manufacturing unit operating in the area does the same thing, they said.

Air quality back to 'severe' category

Level of PM2.5 is four times more than safe limit as per Indian standards: CPCB

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The air quality of Delhi was back in the "severe" category on Wednesday and is likely to improve by Thursday and further on Friday, according to government-run monitoring agency, System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting and Research (SAFAR).

On Wednesday, the average level of PM 2.5 – deadly respirable particles – was (265.5 ug/m3) more than four times the safe limit (60ug/m3) as per Indian standards in Delhi and NCR at 9 p.m., according to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). On November 3, the PM2.5 level in Delhi and NCR had hit 625 ug/m3 – more than 10 times the safe limit. But the level is more than 10 times the safe limit (25 ug/m3) set by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

People are advised to avoid all outdoor physical activities, give morning walk a miss and close windows of rooms. "Stop any



A metro train crosses the Yamuna river on a cold and smoggy Wednesday. • R.V. MOORTHY

activity if you experience any unusual coughing, chest discomfort, wheezing, breathing difficulty or fatigue and consult a doctor," SAFAR said.

Delhi's Air Quality Index (AQI) on Wednesday was 408, up from Tuesday's 369, according to the 4 p.m. bulletin by the CPCB, which is the average of the last 24 hours.

The air quality is severe due to low wind speed and low inversion layer height,

Air quality of Delhi-NCR			
Delhi	408	Gurgaon	370
Ghaziabad	441	Faridabad	390
Noida	426	Greater Noida	449
Good	0-50	Satisfactory	51-100
Moderate	101-200	Poor	201-300
Very poor	301-400	Severe	>401

AIR QUALITY INDEX AT 4 P.M. YESTERDAY (AVERAGE OF PAST 24 HOURS) | SOURCE: CPCB

according to SAFAR.

"Under the influence of approaching western disturbance, increased wind speed and scattered rainfall

is expected by Thursday evening. SAFAR model suggests an improvement in AQI towards the lower end of the very poor category by December 12. By December 13, further improvement in AQI is forecast towards the lower end of the poor to the moderate category," SAFAR said. "Only a few biomass fire counts have observed and no significant biomass fire PM2.5 contribution is expected in the coming days," it added.

Surging ahead



CRPF personnel during a rehearsal at the Parliament House complex on Wednesday. Parliament attack anniversary will be observed on Friday. • SANDEEP SAXENA

Nod for revision in metro phase IV funding

Now, Centre and Delhi government to share cost of land in 50:50 ratio

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved the revision in the funding pattern of Delhi Metro Phase-IV which will lead to the Delhi government and the Centre sharing the land cost in a 50:50 ratio.

The approval pertains to the three priority corridors

which got the Centre's nod earlier this year including the Aerocity-Tughlakabad, R.K. Ashram-Janakpuri West and Mulundpur-Maujpur corridors.

The decision was taken at a Cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Currently, the Centre and the Delhi government

share the cost of Delhi Metro projects on a 50:50 ratio and with Wednesday's approval, the land cost will also be shared in a similar ratio.

A statement issued by the government said that the move was in compliance with a September 6 Supreme Court order and in pursuance of the amend-

ments to the Metro Rail Policy 2017, applicable only for Delhi.

"The total cost of the project which is ₹24,948.65 crore remains unchanged. The contribution from GOI increases from the existing ₹4154.20 crore to ₹4643.63 crore resulting in a net increase of ₹489.43 crore," the statement read.

2 men wanted in dacoity held in Bihar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Two men wanted in a case of dacoity of jewellery worth ₹90 lakh in a moving train near Subzi Mandi railway station here have been arrested from Gaya in Bihar, the police said on Wednesday.

Surender Paswan and Runnu Kumar, carrying a reward of ₹20,000 each on their arrest, were arrested

on Monday. They were recently declared proclaimed offenders by a city court, they said.

"During interrogation, Paswan revealed that one of his relatives, Santosh used to work at a jewellery shop in Chandni Chowk. In last week of April, 2019, Santosh informed him that one Lal Babu Yadav would collect huge quantity of jewellery from

Chandni Chowk and deliver the same to a jeweller in Siwan, Bihar," said DCP (Special Cell) P.S. Kushwah.

Surender hatched a plan to rob the jewellery from the carrier and also roped in his other associates, he said. As per the plan, they boarded the local train from Sadar Bazar Railway station and robbed jewellery from Yadav.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GURUGRAM

One of the accused in the gang-rape of a teenage girl in Palwal here earlier this month has been arrested. The accused confessed to having raped the girl, said the police. The remaining three accused are on the run.

The accused, Altaf, was arrested following a tip-off that he was at Utawad Chowk and planning to flee. Altaf purportedly told the police that he was partner with the girl's father in a liquor business and used to often visit her house. He befriended the girl during his visits. The girl called him over phone asking him to come over on December 4 and he then raped her. The girl's mother then got a case registered against him and his friends accusing them of having gang-raped her.

According to the FIR, the victim, aged around 17 years, had gone out to relieve herself around 11 p.m. when the four men abducted her and took her to the fields on the outskirts of the village. The teenager returned two hours later and told her mother that the accused had raped her. Her parents were not at home when they abducted the girl, said the FIR.

Police can use simple Urdu, Persian words while registering FIR: court

HC clarifies it while disposing of a plea challenging police circular

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday clarified that it had, in a previous order, directed that FIRs should be registered in simple language, and archaic Urdu and Persian words could be avoided.

A Bench of Chief Justice D.N. Patel and Justice C. Hari Shankar also clarified that police could use simple Urdu and Persian words while registering complaints.

The Bench made the clarification while disposing of a petition challenging a police circular to its stations to stop the use of 383 Urdu or Persian words while registering

FIRs.

The petitioner, Naima Pasha, claimed that the circular was issued "purportedly" on the High Court's August 7 direction to use simple words while lodging complaints, as some Urdu and Persian words of general use also figured in the list of 383 terms.

"Archaic Urdu and Persian words ought not to be utilised [while lodging FIRs] and that is what we intended to convey by our order of August 7 in a separate pending PIL before us. Urdu and Persian words of general use can be used," the court said.

In a separate petition, the court had on November 25

called for 100 FIR copies to ascertain whether the circular of November 20 was being adhered to. The police on Wednesday submitted the FIR copies before the court which noted that the words prohibited in the circular were still being used while registering complaints.

The court noted that police was taking steps to avoid usage of archaic Urdu and Persian words as it has issued a circular and the FIRs also indicate decrease in use of such terms. The court also asked the police to put up on its website the list of Urdu and Persian words, whose use has been prohibited.

IN BRIEF

Security guard shoots self accidentally

NEW DELHI
A 40-year-old security guard, identified as Madan Lal, allegedly shot himself accidentally while cleaning his service pistol in south West Delhi's Kishangarh on Tuesday night, the police said on Wednesday. They said that the man was cleaning the pistol when a bullet hit his stomach. He was rushed to a hospital where he is currently undergoing treatment, the police said, adding that the matter is being probed.

DDA approves change of land use in Narela

The DDA on Wednesday gave its nod for change of land use in Narela from commercial to public and semi-public to facilitate educational hubs in the area. In a meeting chaired by L-G Anil Bajjal, the change in land use of approximately 36.6 hectares in Narela was approved. The proposal will now be sent to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs for the final notification, said officials.

Delay in setting up fast-track courts: DCW writes letter

**STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI**

The Delhi Commission for Women (DCW) on Wednesday wrote to the Central and the Delhi governments over the delay in setting up of fast-track courts in the national capital.

"The Commission has learnt that there is an acute shortage of fast-track courts in Delhi and as per the latest assessment, an additional 45 fast track courts are required. This is a very serious matter as currently, the fast-track courts suffer from severe pendencies leading to judicial delays having unimaginable consequences on the life and liberty of lakhs of sexual assault survivors," read the letter.

The women's commission, in its letter to the Central and State governments, also sought details of fast-track courts that have been sanctioned by the government but not operationalised, number of courts sanctioned and reasons for non-operation-alisation of the same.

Additionally, the panel also sought information pertaining to whether or not assessments of any kind on the required number of fast-track courts have been conducted.

Authorities have been asked to provide the information by December 13.

'Register new vehicle when owner shows proof of disposal of old one'

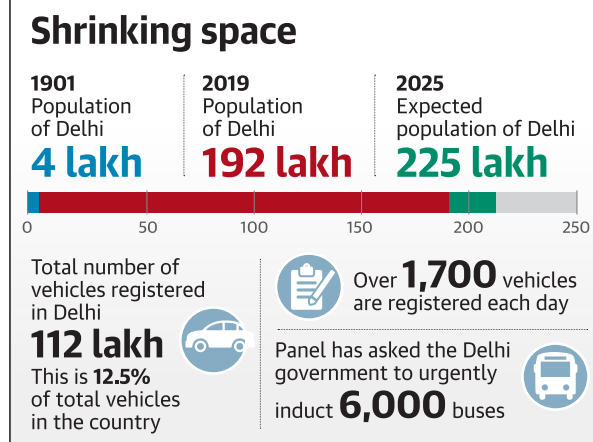
Parliamentary panel makes recommendation in report tabled on Wednesday

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI**

Registration of a new vehicle should be done only when the owner produces proof of disposal of the old vehicle and availability of parking space, parliamentary panel on Home Affairs headed by Congress leader Anand Sharma has recommended in its report "The Management of Worsening Traffic Situation in Delhi" which was tabled in Parliament on Wednesday.

Taking a grim view of the traffic situation in Delhi, the panel has made 107 recommendations based on their consultations with Union Ministries of Home Affairs, Road Transport and Highways and Housing and Urban Affairs and representatives of the Delhi government, four urban local bodies, DDA, Delhi Police and other agencies.

The number of vehicles registered each day in Delhi is growing. The population of Delhi has grown from 4 lakh in 1901 to over 192 lakh now and projected to rise to 225 lakh by 2025. There is 112 lakh vehicles in Delhi accounting for 12.50% of total vehicles in the country. And over 1,700 vehicles are registered each day here, stated



the report.

"Registration of new vehicles should be allowed only if the old vehicle is either scrapped or disposed of and if the occupant of a house has parking space," the panel has noted. It also recommended that insurance premium for the vehicles should be connected directly to traffic rule violations.

Expressing concern over old and unfit vehicles plying on Delhi roads, the committee recommended strict action to ensure compliance with the order of National Green Tribunal on phasing out diesel and petrol vehicles of 10 and 15 years vintage

respectively.

The panel flagged that public transport falls woefully short. There has been no addition to the bus fleet in the last ten years, the panel said. It has strongly recommended the Delhi government to ensure addition of 6,000 more buses at the earliest. Taking note of poor response to some tenders in this regard, the committee said that there is a need to revise the norms to invite adequate response.

The panel also pulled up Delhi Police, asking them to focus on rule enforcement not only at traffic lights but also to ensure on-road discipline like lane driving.

Acknowledging the positive impact of the Delhi Metro and noting that it has, however, not made much different to the number of vehicles on Delhi roads for want of last-mile connectivity, the panel urged DMRC to undertake multi-modal integration at all the stations besides increasing the fleet strength and frequency, rationalisation of fares and expansion to the unconnected areas.

There should be separate lanes for the VIP traffic, the committee has suggested. "The Ministry of Home Affairs should coordinate with all concerned to ensure free and safe movement of important persons without inconveniencing the commuters," the report said.

The panel also recommended exploration of dedicated lanes for emergency vehicles like ambulances and fire engines to save precious lives and for two-wheelers as well in view of their substantial number using Delhi roads.

The panel expressed anguish over non-introduction of computer-based Area Traffic Control Systems which is operational in South East Asian countries for 30 years.

In a first, 66 fire officials from city to take part in service games

2nd edition of Indian Fire Services Games will be held in Lucknow

**HEMANI BHANDARI
NEW DELHI**

For the first time, 66 fire officials from Delhi will participate in the second edition of the Indian Fire Services Games to be held in Lucknow. Delhi Fire Services (DFS) said that this is the only time firemen interact with their counterparts from other States.

DFS Director Atul Garg confirmed the development and said that the 66 firemen and fire officers will be participating in the games organised by Fire Services Games Association of India, a non-profit organization. The event is scheduled for December 20-22 in Lucknow's Mahanagar.

"There are two purposes for us to send our firemen. One is that our firemen will go, win medals and make Delhi proud. They would also then participate internationally and make the country proud. Secondly and importantly, they will meet firemen from other States and share ideas," Mr. Garg said.

The Director said that the event provides the firemen an opportunity to communicate with their counterparts in other States and



The event is scheduled for December 20-22 in Lucknow's Mahanagar. •SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

discuss how they carry out rescue operations.

While this is the first time that a huge contingent of fire officials is going to participate in the games, this is the second time the DFS is participating. In 2018, the first edition of the games was held in Nagpur and 27 DFS officials participated in the event. "We could not send a lot of people last time due to a shortage of manpower, but with over 500 firemen having been recruited recently, we can now send more," Mr. Garg said.

At the games, apart from usual badminton, arm wrestling and tug of war events, firemen compete in fire-re-

lated events like rescue, confined space rescue, ladder drill, and tunnel rescue which enhances their skill. Last year, 10 firemen won medals – five gold, two silver and three bronze.

Selection process

When asked how the firemen were selected for participation in the games, Mr. Garg said that an internal event was organised in the last week of November and those who won were selected. "A notification was sent out regarding the event in November and those who were interested participated. After they get selected, they train on their own," he said.

Eatery owner beaten to death by customer for refusing to play cards

Accused has been arrested, murder case registered: police

**STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI**

A 60-year-old eatery owner was beaten to death allegedly by a 24-year-old customer after the victim refused to play cards with the latter in north Delhi's Kashmere Gate, the police said on Wednesday. The accused has been arrested, they said.

A senior police officer said that the accused has been identified as Govind alias Golu, a resident of Kashmere Gate, who allegedly killed Chandra Shekhar Kashyap who owned an eatery in the area. The incident was reported on Sunday and the accused was arrested on the same day, the police said.

The officer said that the victim lived in Kashmere Gate earlier and had later shifted to Karawal Nagar but continued to run the eatery known as 'Shekhar ka dhaba'. The accused would



come to the eatery often and play cards with Kashyap, complainant Mohammed Shahid who used to work at the eatery told the police.

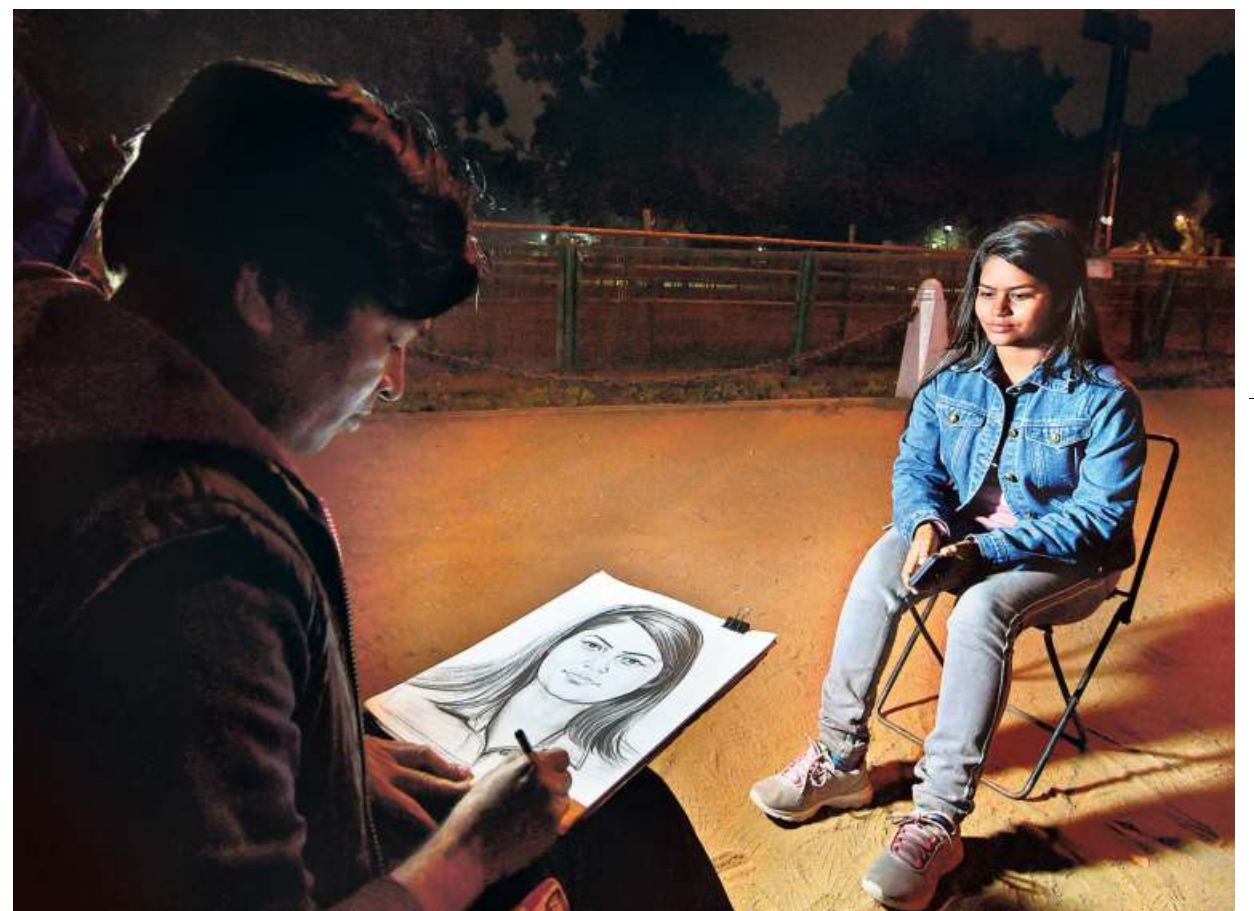
Mr. Shahid told the police that on the day of the incident, Mr. Govind had come to the eatery around 5 p.m. and asked Kashyap to play cards with him. After the victim refused to play, an argument broke out between the two. The argument turned violent and both of them hit each

other, Mr. Shahid also said. The complainant and a few others intervened and tried to stop the fight. However, during the fight Kashyap had abused Mr. Govind after which he started punching the victim. Mr. Govind hit Kashyap a few times on his head after which the victim lost consciousness. The accused then fled the spot.

The complainant and another employee rushed Kashyap to Aruna Asif Ali Government Hospital where he was declared brought dead. The police were then informed about the incident.

The police then registered a case under Section 302 of the Indian Penal Code and a probe by a team comprising Inspector U. Balashankaram and Sub-Inspector Satender Singh was conducted. The accused was subsequently arrested on Sunday night, they said.

Picture-perfect



An artist making a sketch of a woman at Rajpath in New Delhi on Wednesday. •SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

Nirbhaya case: convict's father seeks FIR against eyewitness

'He charged money to appear in interviews on TV channels'

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI**

The father of one of the convicts in the 2012 Nirbhaya case on Wednesday moved a Delhi court seeking an FIR against the only eyewitness for allegedly giving interviews to news channels after charging money, claiming it affected the case by "resulting into a media trial".

The eyewitness, a friend of the victim, was accompanying her on the bus when the incident took place. The complaint filed by Heera Lal Gupta, father of Pawan Kumar Gupta, cited some recent media reports which alleged that witness charged money to appear for interviews, said advocate A.P. Singh.

'Independent probe'

"This calls for an independent investigation into the perjury that appears to have been committed by him [witness], being the sole witness, his testimony has strongly influenced the outcome of the case which led to the imposition of death penalty of the accused," the complaint said.

Citing the reports, the advocate added: "On the basis of said facts and circumstances, it is clear that the conduct of him clearly shows that his testimony was false and fabricated... This goes to the root of his testimony and if established would show that the testimony in fact false."

The complaint said based on witness' "false" testimony the accused in the Nirbhaya gang rape case were convicted and given capital punishment. The lawyer told the court that a complaint was filed with the police to lodge an FIR in this regard, however, no action was taken. A Delhi court had recently directed Tihar Jail authorities to produce the four convicts before it on December 13 so that they can apprise the court about the status of their petitions.

Execution of convicts

The court was hearing a plea by the victim's parents who have sought a direction to the jail authorities to expedite the execution of the convicts.

The victim's parents had approached the court say-

ing the convicts have exhausted all legal remedies.

In December last year, Nirbhaya's parents had approached the court to fast-track the procedure to hang all four convicts in the case.

The Supreme Court on December 12, 2018, had dismissed a PIL seeking direction to the Centre to execute the death penalty awarded to the four convicts in the Nirbhaya gang rape and murder case.

A 23-year-old woman in December 2012 was gang-raped and brutalised in a moving bus in south Delhi by six persons.

The woman had boarded the bus in Munirka in south Delhi along with her male friend on her way back home on December 16 that year. After raping and brutalising the woman and beating her friend, the assailants had thrown them out of the bus.

After receiving initial treatment in New Delhi for a few days, she was transferred to Mount Elizabeth Hospital in Singapore, where she succumbed to injuries on December 29, 2012.

Delhi govt.'s free pilgrimage scheme suspended temporarily

AAP has blamed BJP for the cancellation of trains

**STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI**

Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia on Wednesday said that a scheme which provides free pilgrimage to senior citizens in Delhi has been temporarily suspended, as Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation Limited (IRCTC) has informed the Delhi government that they cannot provide trains.

Addressing a press conference on Wednesday, Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia, said, "Mukhyamantri Tirth Yatra Yojana is temporarily suspended as the IRCTC intimated the Delhi government of the cancellation of trains scheduled from December 10 onwards."

Mr. Sisodia said that he has asked time to meet the Union Railway Minister to discuss the issue and would try to resolve it soon.

AAP blamed the BJP for the cancellation of trains and termed it as "dirty politics", adding that the BJP is "scared of losing the upcoming Assembly election in Delhi".



Deputy CM Manish Sisodia made the announcement on Wednesday. •FILE PHOTO

Maheish Giri termed the allegations as "cheap politics" and said that it has become a habit of the Delhi government to announce new schemes and hide their failures by blaming the Central government when it [Delhi government] is not able to complete them [Centre]. "The Central government made trains available for the 'Mukhyamantri Tirth Yatra Yojana' during the elections in Karnataka and Jharkhand for troop movements and Mr. Kejriwal is trying to get political mileage from this issue," he said.

"The BJP is trying to stall this project in despair of their impending defeat in the upcoming Vidhan Sabha election in Delhi. If the BJP

thinks that stalling free pilgrimage for senior citizens will make them win the election, then I must say that it will have to fight the election with the curse of the senior citizens of Delhi," said AAP Delhi convenor Gopal Rai at a press conference.

"Where will the four special trains, booked for Delhi's senior citizens, be diverted to from December 10?" Mr. Rai asked the BJP.

"Since July this year, the Mukhyamantri Tirth Yatra Yojana has been going well with the cooperation of the Indian Railways. We had undertaken an MoU with the IRCTC for the same. This scheme provided the elderly people in Delhi an invaluable opportunity to go for pilgrimage with the complete financial support of the Delhi government and thereby fulfilling one of their precious dreams. We hope that this unexpected difficulty will be resolved soon", the Deputy Chief Minister added.

Since July 12, 32,828 elderly pilgrims from Delhi have visited 10 destinations in 34 trips, the government said.

Air India told to pay MP ₹50,000 compensation

Airline cancelled his ticket to Ahmedabad

**STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI**

A district consumer disputes redressal forum here has directed Air India to compensate MP Devji Patel by paying ₹50,000 for cancelling a ticket booked for travelling from Delhi to Ahmedabad despite the complainant having reached the airport on time.

Directing the airline to pay the settlement amount to Mr. Patel, the consumer Bench said, "It is observed that the mental pain, agony and suffering due to loss of his reputation has to be commensurate with the amount claimed, accordingly the settlement amount of ₹50,000 is totally justified even on merit of the case, inclusive of the mental agony and harassment to the complainant."

The Bench has also directed the airline to pay an additional amount of ₹10,000 as litigation charges.

The directions came when the consumer forum was hearing a plea moved by Mr. Patel, alleging that on reaching the airport an hour before the flight departure, he was informed



that the ticket had been allotted to another passenger.

"The complainant had to attend some important election meeting in Ahmedabad on November 28, 2012 and hence booked an air ticket from the [airline] at the Parliament Ticket Counter. Its departure time was 18:40. The complainant entered the airport at 17:40 where he was informed that his tickets were cancelled by officials of the airline," the Bench observed while noting the allegations.

The airline had, however, contended that the complainant had failed to reach the check-in-counter on time.

FIR filed against 520 AMU students

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GHAZIABAD

An FIR has been filed against 20 named and 500 unnamed students of Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) in connection with their protest against the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill on Tuesday night.

Superintendent of Police (City) Abhishek said the students did not seek permission from the city administration. "Some of the student leaders misbehaved with the officers and heckled some constables. An FIR was registered under Sections 188 and 353 of the IPC," he said.

Those named in the FIR include outgoing students' union president Salman Imtiaz and former AMUSU president Faizul Hasan. "It is our democratic right to protest against the violation of the Constitution," Mr. Imtiaz said.

Kishor fires fresh salvo at JD(U) over CAB stance

'Spare a moment for those who reposed faith, trust in party'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
PATNA

A recalcitrant JD(U) national vice president Prashant Kishor on Wednesday stuck to his guns, stating that the party – headed by Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar – should have spared "a moment for all those who reposed their faith and trust in it" during the Assembly polls in the State four years ago.

Mr. Kishor, also took a dig at Mr. Kumar for his turnaround of 2017 when he dumped the Grand Alliance and returned to the NDA, with the remark that the party "and its managers would not have been left with much to cut any deal with anyone" had it not won the Assembly polls two years earlier.

JD(U) had fought 2015 Bihar polls in alliance with the



JD(U) national vice president Prashant Kishor. FILE PHOTO

Congress and the RJD.

"While supporting #CAB, the JD(U) leadership should spare a moment for all those who reposed their faith and trust in it in 2015. We must not forget that but for the victory of 2015, the party and its managers would not have been left with much to cut any deal with anyone", Mr. Kishor

tweeted.

The poll strategist-turned-politicians latest outbursts came barely a few hours after Mr. Kumar's close aide and State Minister Sanjay Jha had dismissed contrary opinions expressed by Mr. Kishor and national general secretary Pavan Varma as "personal opinions".

'Personal views'

Rajya Sabha member and president of the JD(U)s Bihar unit Vashishth Narayan Singh also said in the national capital that once the party had made its stand clear, leaders should have refrained from "making public their personal views".

There is no fresh comment from Mr. Varma, who also voiced disagreement on supporting CAB.

Cong. protests in Punjab, Haryana, H.P.

Party lashes out at Modi government for bringing CAB which is 'unconstitutional'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH

Congress leaders and workers in Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh on Wednesday held protests against the the BJP-led Centre government for bringing the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill 2019.

They held demonstrations in Haryana's Panchkula and Himachal Pradesh's capital Shimla criticising the Modi government for bringing the contentious Bill, which they termed as "unconstitutional".

Memo to Governor

In Punjab, party leaders led by State Congress chief Sunil Jakhar met Governor V.P. Singh Badnore and submitted a memorandum through him to the President, requesting him not to approve the Bill. Mr. Jakhar said the Centre had failed on the economic front and the country was badly hit by recession.



Cong. workers protest against Citizenship (Amendment) Bill in Chandigarh on Wednesday. PTI

"to hide its failure, the Modi government wanted to shatter communal harmony by implementing the Bill so that people can be distracted from the real issues."

Mr. Jakhar said the task of dividing the society in the name of religion was left unfulfilled by the 'British go-

vernment' but now the BJP wanted to complete British rulers' agenda.

Slogans against Centre

In Panchkula, Congress workers led by Ram Kishan Gurjar carried placards condemning the amendment and shouted slogans against

the Centre.

In Shimla, State Congress president Kuldeep Rathore said the Bill violated the secular principles of the Constitution.

"This Bill reflects the ill-intentions of the ruling party, which can strike at the root of national unity," he said.

Law student released from Shahjahanpur jail

Arrested in alleged extortion case

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
SHAHJAHANPUR (U.P.)

The 23-year-old law student, arrested for allegedly trying to extort ₹5 crore from the BJP leader Swami Chinmayanand, whom she had accused of sexually exploiting her, was released from the jail here on Wednesday.

She was released a week after securing bail from the Allahabad High Court in the extortion case lodged against her and her three friends.

"The girl has been handed over to her father after a release order from Chief Judicial Magistrate Omveer reached the jail. She was granted bail by the Allahabad High Court on December 4,"

Jailor Rajesh Kumar Rai said.

The law student and her three friends were booked on Chinmayanand's complaint that they had demanded ₹5 crore from him.

Ex-Minister's allegation

The former Union Minister had alleged that they had threatened to make public some video clips that showed him getting massage from the law student, who was later arrested on September 25. Chinmayanand, whose trust runs the Shahjahanpur Law College where the girl studied, was arrested under Section 376 C of the IPC and continues to be in judicial custody.

Punjab govt. behind illegal sand mining: SAD

'Goonda tax' being collected at the behest of Congress leaders, alleges Badal

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH

The Shiromani Akali Dal members on Wednesday staged a protest against the Congress government in the State, accusing its leaders of "patronising illegal sand mining trade and the mafia."

AKALI Dal president Sukhbir Badal, who led the sit-in protest in Mohali, alleged that reckless illegal mining activity were rampant in Mohali and "goonda tax" was being collected at the behest of Congress leaders.

"Illegal sand mining is going on in Mohali even though no mines were operational in the district in government records. While mining was being done, the same had not been given government



SAD chief Sukhbir Badal. FILE PHOTO

clearances till now, which means all mining taking place in Mohali was illegal," he alleged.

Mr. Badal said environmental clearance had been deliberately not given to the miners and they were allowed to mine sand illegally without paying a rupee to the State. "Illegal mining is even being allowed in forest

areas, people backed by Congress are indulging in this practice," he said.

Dera Bassi MLA N.K. Sharma said that the "goons" in the area had become so bold that they had put up 'nakas' (collection barriers) on roads to collect 'goonda tax,' he alleged.

Separately, a Ropar based advocate and RTI activist Dinesh Chadha told *The Hindu* that similar kind of illegal sand mining and collection of "goonda tax" was rampant in Ropar district.

"In January this year on my petition, the National Green Tribunal had asked a joint committee – comprising members of the Central Pollution Control Board and Punjab State Pollution Con-

trol Board – to take remedial measures to stop illegal mining and assess damage in Ropar district. The tribunal had also ordered action against the erring officials within two months, but no concrete action has been taken so far by the State government," said Mr. Chadha.

Status report

"I had recently again approached the NGT, complaining that the State government as well as other parties have failed in implementing NGT's previous orders in the matter. Today, the NGT has issued notices to State government, directing it to submit a status report within four weeks," said Mr. Chadha.

Polling in Jharkhand today

Voting in 17 Assembly constituencies

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
RANCHI

About 40,000 polling personnel have been deputed to conduct smooth and peaceful voting in the third of the five-phase polling for 17 Assembly constituencies on Thursday, Jharkhand Chief Election Officer Vinay Kumar Choubey said on Wednesday.

Security tightened

He said security forces have also been deployed in the constituencies that will witness voting on December 12. The fate of 309 candidates, including 32 women, will be decided by 56,18,267 voters, the CEO told a press conference here.

These include a total of 26,80,205 women and 86

third gender voters.

Stating that there are LWE (left wing extremist) pockets in this phase, Mr. Choubey said that polling personnel of 96 polling stations have been dropped by helicopters. and ten polling stations have been re-located on security ground.

"Polling personnel of 188 polling stations were sent two days ago and they have reached there and almost all the officials to other booths have reached," Mr. Choubey said.

The polling personnel of 626 polling stations will return to their respective district headquarters the next day (Friday) and arrangements of CCTV and double-lock strong rooms have been made, the CEO said.

Principal held after faces of 6 students 'blackened'

They were paraded on school premises in Haryana for securing less marks

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
HISAR (HARYANA)

The principal of a private school here was arrested on Wednesday after faces of six Class IV students, including two girls, were allegedly blackened and they were paraded in its premises for securing less marks in a test, police said.

A spokesman of the police department said that the principal was arrested in connection with a case registered against her and three teachers under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection



Haryana Home Minister Anil Vij flayed the incident.

of Children) Act and SC and ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act.

The case was registered on a complaint lodged by the parents of a nine-year-old Dalit girl, he added.

The incident had taken place on Friday and the girl had informed her parents about it.

Her parents told reporters that the family members went to the school to complain about the treatment meted out to the children, but the authorities failed to take action against the staff responsible.

On Monday, the girl's family was joined by some other parents and they held a protest outside the old vegetable market police post here, demanding that the police

take immediate action in the matter.

On Tuesday, Education Minister Kanwar Pal, when asked by reporters to comment on the incident, said in Chandigarh that such things would not be tolerated.

"Whatever action is required to be taken in the matter is being taken and a FIR has already been registered," the Minister had said.

Home Minister Anil Vij, while strongly condemning the incident, said necessary action had been initiated in the matter.

Gram Sabha revives spirit of Gram Swaraj

17-point agenda for rural development

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
JAIPUR

A special Gram Sabha held in Jaipur district's Awania village on Tuesday revived the spirit of Gram Swaraj, with the villagers taking part in an exercise to formulate a Five Year Plan with the allocations for different sectors. The villagers also questioned the panchayat functionaries and government officials on the expenditures on welfare schemes.

The Gram Sabha was organised as part of Mahatma Gandhi's 150th birth anniversary celebrations. Awania Sarpanch Madan Lal Chaudhary said the village had been selected recently as a Mahatma Gandhi Adarsh Gram, envisaging community participation in the development works.

Vocational training

A 17-point agenda for rural development was evolved in the Gram Sabha, which was the first of its kind held in the region. Zila Parishad CEO Bharti Dixit laid emphasis on giving vocational training to women in the vil-



A Gram Sabha in Jaipur district's Awania village.

lage and asked the villagers to get full benefit of various welfare schemes.

Mr. Chaudhary said the dream of Gram Swaraj would be realised with the participation of villagers in the formulation of development schemes on both the theoretical and executional fronts. He called upon the villagers to assist the government officials in working for implementation of all the 17 plans identified for rural development.

Men and women from the village sought to know the details of plans for nutrition and health care of women and children, enrolment of children in the local government school and employ-

NORTHEAST ON THE BOIL

Protests in Assam and Tripura took a violent turn on Wednesday as thousands of people, including students, hit the streets and fought pitched battles with security forces over the contentious Citizenship (Amendment) Bill



Anger on the streets: (Clockwise from left) College students and locals burning tyres at Tinsukia in Assam; demonstrators being detained by security personnel in Agartala; people protesting during the 12-hour Assam bandh; a policeman trying to douse a fire in Guwahati; and demonstrators protesting in Agartala on Wednesday. •PTI, RITU RAJ KONWAR & AP



5,000 paramilitary personnel rushed to the Northeast

CRPF, BSF, SSB troops will maintain law and order

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

The Centre on Wednesday airlifted 5,000 paramilitary personnel to the Northeastern States, including Assam, for maintenance of law and order duties in the wake of protests over the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, officials said.

Nearly 20 companies (2,000 personnel) have been withdrawn from Kashmir, where they had been sent prior to the Centre's decision on August 5 to abrogate Article 370 provisions and split the erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir into two Union Territories.

The remaining 30 companies have been withdrawn from other places and rushed to the Northeastern States, the officials said.

The troops are from the Central Reserve Police Force, the Border Security Force and the Sashastra Seema Bal.

Bus services suspended Internet services remained suspended for the second day and paramilitary forces along with Tripura State Rifles personnel were deployed on Wednesday in some districts of Tripura, which was rocked by anti-CAB violence, officials said.

Internet services will remain suspended till Thursday, the officials said.

Train and bus services were also suspended, they added.

Airlines halt cargo movement to NE

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

IndiGo has stopped cargo movement to four airports in the Northeast from Kolkata on Wednesday night – Guwahati, Dimapur, Agartala and Dibrugarh.

The airline is one of the

top cargo carriers to the Northeast. Passenger flights, however, have not been stopped yet.

SpiceJet too stopped cargo movement to Guwahati and Dibrugarh while AirAsia halted cargo movement to Agartala and Guwahati.

'BJP still hopeful of alliance with Sena'

Chandrakant Patil rubbishes reports of disaffected Eknath Khadse and Pankaja Munde quitting party

SHOUMJOIT BANERJEE
PUNE

With the Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi government of the Shiv Sena, the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), and the Congress yet to decide on the portfolio allocation, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) State president Chandrakant Patil on Wednesday said he is still hopeful of a BJP-Sena alliance in the near future given that the two saffron parties are "natural allies".

"The two parties are natural allies. The Hindutva ideology courses through their veins. We [the BJP and the Sena] have had an alliance for the last 30 years and I am still hopeful of one in the future," Mr. Patil, who is an MLA from Pune's Kothrud, said.

Mr. Patil was reacting to former chief minister and senior Sena leader Manohar Joshi's statement on Tuesday that both estranged parties could come together in the near future and that Sena chief Uddhav Thackeray would take a decision on this at the right time.

"Ideally, both the BJP and the Sena ought to have come together and formed a government after the Assembly poll results were out as we had the mandate," said Mr.

Patil, adding the doors for discussion were always open to the Sena and that the BJP had no pride or arrogance in this matter.

The BJP leader quelled suggestions that disaffected OBC leaders within the party Eknath Khadse and Pankaja Munde will be exiting the BJP. "They [Mr. Khadse and Ms. Munde] are not any freshly inducted leaders into the BJP fold but senior and experienced leaders. Mr. Khadse and Ms. Munde had some issues and were upset about certain things which they have confided in me. But this does not mean that they are going to leave the party."

Mr. Patil said the BJP's ideals have been imbibed by Ms. Munde since her childhood, and alleged that rumours of Ms. Munde's alleged disenchantment with the BJP is a mere figment of the media's imagination. "Likewise, Mr. Khadse has been instrumental in building the BJP in Maharashtra along with the late Gopinath Munde. There is no way that he will quit the party."

The BJP State chief also said he will take part in the much-anticipated 'Swabhimani' rally organised by Ms.



Chandrakant Patil said the two parties are natural allies and the Hindutva ideology courses through their veins. *FILE PHOTO

Munde at Gopinathgad in Beed district on December 12 to mark the birth anniversary of her late father. All eyes are on Ms. Munde's rally where it is expected she would clear the air on whether she would indeed be quitting the BJP or float a new outfit of OBC communi-

ties, as is the grapevine.

Mr. Khadse, who has been a critic of his party's functioning, was denied a ticket by the BJP high command in the Assembly polls. While a ticket was finally given to his daughter Rohini Khadse, the latter suffered a major upset in Mr. Khadse's stronghold at

Muktanagar in Jalgaon.

Ms. Munde, too, suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of her estranged cousin, the NCP's Dhananjay Munde, in the fiercely contested Parli segment.

Since then, both leaders have bitterly hinted that their downfall was engineered by some leaders within the party, giving rise to speculation of the BJP's OBC leaders raising the banner of revolt. Mr. Khadse has held parleys with Mr. Thackeray and NCP supreme Sharad Pawar, triggering buzz on a possible defection to either party.

Leaders unhappy: NCP

Meanwhile, NCP leader Chhagan Bhujbal said he sympathises with the situation of OBC leaders in the BJP, but he does not think a highly experienced leader like Mr. Khadse will quit his party in a rash manner.

"They [Mr. Khadse and Mr. Munde] are experienced leaders and would take the right political decision... Mr. Khadse will be welcome if he comes to our party [the NCP] or joins the Sena... However, there is no denying that OBC leaders within the BJP are unhappy," Mr. Bhujbal said.

Eyeing 2024, Shetti announces major organisational overhaul

Party aims to send more legislators to Assembly and one MP

SHOUMJOIT BANERJEE
PUNE

In a major overhaul, Swabhimani Paksha chief Raju Shetti on Wednesday dissolved his party's working committee to rebuild the organisation before the 2024 parliamentary and Assembly polls. Mr. Shetti announced his decision at a meeting of party leaders and workers in Solapur.

The farmers' leader said fresh internal elections will be conducted over the next two months at the zilla and State levels. "The two-year tenure of most of the members in the organisation had come to an end. So, this move to dissolve the present leadership has been taken to build the organisation anew. By January 11 next year, we will have established a new leadership at the village level and by February 11, we will see a leadership at the State level." Mr. Shetti said the revamp will also see the establishment of a disciplinary committee at the divisional level.

The former two-time MP from Hatkanangale in Kolhapur district said the exercise will also factor in the alloca-



Raju Shetti

Swabhimani Paksha's lone MLA Devendra Bhuyar had emerged as a 'giant killer' to defeat BJP leader and State Agriculture Minister Anil Bonde from Morshi segment in Amravati.

"The organisational overhaul is being carried out with the aim to form a new, young leadership drawn from the youthful ranks. We are hoping to send more legislators to the Assembly and an MP to the Lok Sabha at the time of the 2024 polls," said Swabhimani Paksha leader Anil Pawar.

Meanwhile, Mr. Shetti said his party will support the Sena-Congress-NCP's Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi government, but he will not himself seek the key agriculture ministry portfolio. "We will accept it [agriculture portfolio] only in the event my party is respectfully offered it without any conditions attached," he reiterated.

Speculation has recently arisen over the agriculture ministry portfolio being offered to Mr. Shetti, who had denied that a concrete offer in this regard was yet to come from the three big parties.

Discontent among MVA allies delays allocation of portfolios?

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI

The wait for allocation of ministries in the Uddhav Thackeray-led Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government is getting longer, underlining eluding consensus on key portfolios among the ruling Shiv Sena, NCP and Congress, according to sources. Though the allies have officially denied any discontent, sources said the post of deputy chief minister and the Congress' demand for certain portfolios have emerged as the sticking points.

A senior Congress leader on Wednesday said the Sena is likely to keep home and urban development portfolios while the NCP, the second largest bloc in the 288-member Assembly, might get irrigation, housing, and finance.

According to him, the Congress, which has the lowest 44 MLAs among the three ruling constituents,



Uddhav Thackeray

might have to be content with revenue, energy, education, and PWD departments.

As per norms, the Maharashtra government can accommodate maximum 43 ministers. The three parties, which came together to form a coalition government in unusual political circumstances in November, have held a series of meetings for ironing out differences over allocation of portfolios.

As per reports, NCP stalwart Ajit Pawar is in reckoning for the post of deputy chief minister. Ajit, nephew

of NCP chief Sharad Pawar, had broken ranks with his party and joined hands with the BJP on November 23 to form a government under Devendra Fadnis, which lasted just 80 hours. Ajit had recently said that party workers wanted him to be the deputy CM.

Alongside CM Thackeray, Eknath Shinde and Subhash Desai of the Sena, Jayant Patil and Chhagan Bhujbal of the NCP, and Nitin Raut and Balasaheb Thorat of the Congress had taken oath as ministers on November 28. The cabinet expansion will take place after conclusion of the winter session of the State legislature on December 21.

Meanwhile, another senior Congress leader said the party is miffed over not getting key portfolios. "We should get either housing or industries department. The portfolio allocation is not yet approved by the Congress high command," he said.

Joint naval prowess



Bring it on: Personnel of the Indian Navy and the Russian Navy stand guard as Russian warships arrive in Goa on Wednesday to participate in the second edition of a joint tri-services exercise, INDRA 2019. *ATISH POMBURFEKAR

Leopard skin worth ₹10 lakh seized, 2 held in Mira Road

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
THANE

Two persons were arrested in Mira Road and a leopard skin worth ₹10 lakh was seized from them, the police said on Wednesday. The arrest was made on Tuesday.

"The Navghar Police in Mira Road got a tip-off that two persons from Dadra and Nagar Haveli were coming to the township to sell a leopard skin," a release issued by the district police said.

Accordingly, a trap was laid and when the duo reached Golden Nest Circle, they were nabbed. The leopard skin was seized from them.

The accused, identified as Ankit Thorat (24) and Ravindra Patel (25), were booked under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, and investigation into the case is on.

Goa sends reminder to Javdekar on Mahadayi

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
PANAJI

The Goa government has sent a reminder to the Central government about its demand to withdraw the environment clearance exemption given to Karnataka for Kalasa Banduri project on the Mahadayi river.

The State on Tuesday wrote to Union Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change Prakash Javdekar reiterating its demand for withdrawal of the exemption given to the Karnataka government.

Speaking to the media on Wednesday, Chief Minister Pramod Sawant said a reminder has been sent to the Union minister, as his 15-day deadline to sort out the issue has already expired.

Mr. Javdekar, who was in Goa on November 20 to inaugurate International Film Festival of India, had sought 15 days time to act on the Goa government's demand.

The CM said he had personally called Mr. Javdekar on Tuesday reminding him about his assurance. "Mr. Javdekar told me that he was out of station. He was in Spain, and returned on Tuesday. He will look into the matter," he said.

Kashmir, Ram Mandir, religious topics taboo at Pune college fest

Popular competition prohibits 'sensitive' subjects

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
PUNE

The organisers of 'Firodiya Karandak', a popular inter-collegiate drama competition, have decided not to allow plays dealing with "sensitive" subjects such as Babri Masjid, Article 370, Hindu-Muslim relations or caste dynamics.

The annual competition, which began over four decades ago and always draws a full house, will be held in the first week of February. Rules for the event were released on Wednesday.

"To maintain social harmony and law and order, the organisers, from this year, have decided not to permit entries with sensitive subjects like Hindu-Muslim (sic), Jammu & Kashmir, Article 370, India-Pakistan, Ram Mandir and Babri Masjid or subjects that comment on any caste or religion," said a rule. If a group presents a play on any such subject, it would be disqualified, the rules warned.

Chief organiser of the competition, Ajinkya Kulkarni, said, "Being too young and amateur, participants do not have the knowledge and the depth required to handle such sensitive issues. Students are unaware of consequences if something unwar-



To maintain social harmony, the organisers have decided not to permit entries with subjects like Jammu & Kashmir and Article 370. Picture shows a jawan in a deserted street after the scrapping of Article 370 in Srinagar. *FILE PHOTO

ranted is said on this platform, which has a certain legacy, and as organisers, the responsibility lies with us."

The rules do not say that a play should not mention a particular religion, but it must not create ill-feelings against any religion, he said. Firodiya Karandak is a platform for showcasing artistic talent and not political leanings, Mr. Kulkarni said.

"In the past three or four years, we saw that participants came with subjects which have been done to death, commenting on religious and caste lines," he said. Generally, students fa-

vor subjects related to current issues in the country, he said.

"My question to students is, are farmer suicides, drought, economy, unemployment, quality of education not current issues? Why do only subjects with comment on religion and caste interest them?" Mr. Kulkarni said. A bar against a few "sensitive" issues was not curtailment of students' freedom of expression, he argued.

The competition's format allows presentation of a hodge-podge act combining theatre, music and other fine arts.

Richard Branson to meet Uddhav to seek clarity on Mumbai-Pune hyperloop

Virgin Group founder says need to see if new govt. is as keen on project as old one

LALATENDU MISHRA
MUMBAI

Virgin Group founder Sir Richard Branson will meet Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Thursday to brief him about the Virgin Hyperloop One project that will connect Pune to Mumbai.

In Mumbai to promote his Virgin Atlantic airline, Mr. Branson said it would be a courtesy call to clear "misunderstandings" and to gauge the new administration's interest in the hyperloop project.

The project, first mooted during the previous government's rule, is estimated to cost \$10 billion. Mr. Branson's visit to Mr. Thackeray comes after the new government decided to review several infrastructure projects, such as the Mumbai-Ahmedabad bullet train.

He said, "The entire cost of the [hyperloop] project will be borne by the private sector and it will not depend on any funding from the State."

Stating that he would clear any misunderstandings regarding the project, he said, "We just need to see whether the new government is as keen as the old government [on the project]." Mr. Branson said engi-



Virgin Group founder Sir Richard Branson with Mahindra Group chairman Anand Mahindra at a panel discussion in Mumbai on Wednesday. *EMMANUEL YOGINI

neers at the group's hyperloop facility in Las Vegas are working on the project, and are ready to "get going quite soon" with the Mumbai-Pune project, which will reduce travel time to 20 to 30 minutes as compared to several hours today.

The previous government had accorded infrastructure status to the project.

Hyperloop is a new technology wherein vacuum is used to transport people

The entire cost of the [hyperloop] project will be borne by the private sector and it will not depend on any funding from the State

Mumbai hyperloop project could be one of the first few projects globally. Once passengers or cargo is loaded into the hyperloop vehicle, it accelerates through electric propulsion and floats above the track using magnetic levitation to reach the destination. It glides at airline speeds for long distances due to ultra-low aerodynamic drag and is thus called revolutionary technology.

and cargo at a very high speed. The technology is yet to be commercially launched and the Pune-

IN BRIEF


A.P. to increase capacity of canals in Rayalaseema

VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy on Wednesday said the State government was planning to ensure that all irrigation projects in the Rayalaseema region were filled within 50 days of floods. The action plan would be prepared in a month, he said. Mr. Reddy said the government planned to increase the capacity of canals in the region.

CBI launches search for customs official

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Central Bureau of Investigation has launched a search for a senior customs official who was alleged to be the linchpin of a Dubai-based racket that smuggled large amounts of contraband gold into the country through the Thiruvananthapuram international airport early this year. Officials identified the suspect as B. Radhakrishnan, former Superintendent, Customs Air Intelligence Unit, Thiruvananthapuram. The agency is poised to declare him a fugitive.

RTC fare hike comes into effect in Andhra Pradesh

VIJAYAWADA

The marginal increase in the bus fares announced by the Andhra Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation (APSRTC) came into effect on Wednesday. Corporation Vice-Chairman and Managing Director M.T. Krishna Babu said the mounting losses on account of frequent diesel price hike had pushed the public sector giant into a debt trap. He said the corporation had revised the bus fares in 2015 and in these four years, diesel rates had increased from ₹49 to ₹70 a litre, putting an additional financial burden of ₹630 crore annually.

A.P. Cabinet clears Disha Bill to ensure rape verdicts in 21 days

State government will table legislation in the ongoing session of Assembly

STAFF REPORTER
VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh Cabinet on Wednesday cleared the A.P. Disha Bill, 2019 (A.P. Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill, 2019) paving the way for awarding the death penalty for the offences of rape and gang-rape and expediting the verdict in trials of such cases to 21 days. The legislation is to be tabled in the ongoing session of the Assembly.

The Cabinet also gave its nod for introduction of the A.P. Special Court for Specified Offences against Women and Children Bill, 2019, for dealing with offences against women and children, including rape and gang-rape, acid attacks, stalking, voyeurism, sexual harassment and cases under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.

Tackling crime

The key aspects of the A.P. Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill, 2019, which will be tabled in the ongoing winter session of the State Legislature

- Death penalty for heinous offences of rape and gang-rape
- Probe and trial will be completed in 7 and 14 working days respectively
- Judgment time reduced to 21 days from the existing 4 months



The A.P. Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill, 2019, envisages the completion of investigation and trial in seven and 14 working days respectively, where there is adequate conclusive evidence, and reducing the total judgment time to 21 days from the existing four months, government officials said,

speaking on condition of anonymity.

The proposed laws seek to amend relevant provisions in the Indian Penal Code, 1860, and the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, and to introduce Sections 354-E and 354-F in the IPC for dealing with harassment of women through social media

and sexual assault of children respectively.

'Strong message'

Under Section 354-E (harassment of women through social media, digital mode or any other form), it has been proposed to sentence the guilty to imprisonment for up to two years on first conviction and four years on subsequent convictions.

Under Section 354-F (molestation / sexual assault), imprisonment is sought to be increased to a minimum of five years and maximum seven years.

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy told the Assembly on December 9 that he was for speedy trial of rape cases to send the message that the A.P. government was in no mood to tolerate crimes against women and children.

Ex-SC judge declines to head Telangana probe

Petitioners have sought a CBI probe into the police killing of the rape accused

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sharad A. Bobde on Wednesday informed petitioners – advocates G.S. Mani and Mukesh Kumar Sharma, and the Telangana government – who sought an investigation into the extra-judicial killing of four men accused of the gang-rape and murder of a veterinarian in Hyderabad that the court had tapped, Justice (retired) P.V. Reddi to take up the assignment, but he had declined.

Chief Justice Bobde said the court would approach

another retired Supreme Court judge for the job.

Plea for CBI inquiry

Mr. Mani's petition had sought a CBI or a special investigation team probe against Cyberabad Police Commissioner V.C. Sajjanar, who is a respondent in the petition. He said the encounter was a red herring, deliberately done to turn public attention away from the police's inability to prevent such crimes against women.

The petitions were filed last week on a day the CJI and the second most senior

judge of the court Justice N.V. Ramana both voiced their apprehension over the tendency to seek "instant justice" and "revenge".

"Justice can never be instant and should not take the form of revenge," the CJI said in a speech at the inauguration of a new building of the Rajasthan High Court in Jodhpur on December 7.

The petitions urged the court to call for police records of the case and further order an inquiry into the "killings" in accordance with the Supreme Court's 16 guidelines. As per the police, all

the four accused – Mohammed Arif, Chintakunta Chennakeshavulu, Jollu Shiva and Jollu Naveen – were taken to the scene of the crime around 60 km from Hyderabad in the early hours of December 6 for a reconstruction of the crime scene.

The accused then allegedly grabbed the weapons of the police team and opened fire. In the retaliatory fire, the accused died, the police said.

The CJI posted the case for further hearing on December 12.

Ban on parading of two elephants draws protest

Festival committee seeks review

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
THRASSUR

The Forest department's ban on parading two Gurusvayur Devaswom elephants – Padmanabhan and Valiya Keshavan – during festivals has led to widespread protests.

An order issued recently by Prabhu P.M., Assistant Forest Conservator, stated that Padmanabhan is suffering from sore feet and Valiya Keshavan has tuberculosis. The monitoring committee decided not to issue fitness certificates to the pachyderms, as animals that suffer from health issues cannot be put in parades.

A prayer meet is to be held at Gurusvayur on Saturday, by the festival coordination committee, where elephant lovers and devotees will seek the withdrawal of the ban. Festival committees of various devaswoms

will join in. Condemning the ban, the Elephant Owners Federation has alleged that the Forest department was acting according to the whims and fancies of some organisations, which want to "destroy cultural heritage". They urged the department to review the decision.

'Simplify rules'

Meanwhile the Arattupuzha Temple Advisory Board has urged the Union and State governments to simplify the rules pertaining to elephant parading for various festivals.

Various rituals of the 1,437-year-old Arattupuzha Pooram require parading of the elephants, said the festival committee. Around 465 parades will be held over the 13-day festival, which will see participation by 24 temples in central Kerala.

Brick by brick



Workers engaged in construction work in Visakhapatnam on Wednesday. Building activity has picked up pace in Andhra Pradesh with the availability of sand improving after a prolonged shortage. ♦♦♦ K.R. DEEPAK

Stage set for maiden survey of butterflies in A.P. national park

50 experts from Kerala, northeastern States to participate

T. APPALA NAIDU

MACHILIPATNAM
The Andhra Pradesh Forest Department and experts from Kerala and northeastern States will begin the first survey of butterfly species in the Papikonda National Park (PNP) on Thursday. The PNP spreads over 1012.86 sq.km. in East and West Godavari districts.



A butterfly in the Papikonda National Park.

The experts, led by Kerala-based environmental forum Warblers and Waders, will carry out the survey with an aim to record all butterfly species, and also conduct a study on migratory species in the national park in the Papikonda hill range in the Eastern Ghats. Divisional Forest Officer (Rajah-

mundry-Wildlife) Anant Shankar told *The Hindu*, "The four-day survey, from December 12 to 15, is the maiden survey during which the entire national park will be explored, documenting the butterfly species."

"A total of 50 experts, including ornithologists, have

been roped in for the scientific survey. The findings and report will be presented at the 'Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species' to be held in Gandhinagar in February 2020," Mr. Shankar said.

The exercise will offer a picture of the existing biodiversity of the park. The diversity of butterfly species would be considered as a health indicator of the park. Declared as a national park in 2018, preliminary studies have recorded over 80 species of butterflies. Forest Department officials say that the park is home to 121 butterfly species as per their internal studies.

'Unsecured wells pose threat to leopards in Karnataka'

Study records 27 incidents of other wildlife species falling into open wells in the State

R KRISHNA KUMAR
MYSURU

The elusive leopards, which have been deprived of attention in conservation circles, are facing an unconventional threat in Karnataka: unsecured open wells.

A new paper highlights the high number of incidents of the spotted big cats falling into them.

The paper "Big cat in well: An unconventional threat to leopards in southern India" has been published in the scientific journal *Oryx* by wildlife researcher and conservationist Sanjay Gubbi of the Nature Conservation Foundation and his team.

As many as 70 incidents between 2008 and 2017 have been recorded by the team.

According to the authors of the study, the incidents



Open trap: A leopard that has fallen into a dry well in Tumkur district of Karnataka. ♦♦♦ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

were reported from 10 districts and the highest was reported from Udupi district (36) followed by Tumakuru (9), Ramanagaram (8) and Uttara Kannada (8).

The highest number of falls occurred during the



MPs from Telangana Rashtra Samithi and other opposition parties protesting in New Delhi. ♦♦♦ SANDEEP SAXENA

TRS MPs stage dharna over ₹32,000 cr. dues

Centre indifferent to pleas, rues MP

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD

Fourteen Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) MPs, including five from the Rajya Sabha, staged a demonstration for half-an-hour in front of the Mahatma Gandhi's statue in the Parliament complex in New Delhi on Wednesday demanding the release of Central funds due to the State.

Earlier, the TRS members also disrupted the proceedings of the Rajya Sabha, resulting in its adjournment for an hour. The TRS group served a notice to the Chairman to set aside the business and take up a discussion on their demand. They sought an assurance from the Centre on the demand, the way it was conceded to the members from Andhra Pradesh, but it was disallowed by the Chairman.

TRS Rajya Sabha MP Banda Prakash told *The Hindu* that the Centre owed about ₹32,000 crore to the State but was not releasing it despite several reminders. Even the devolution of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) was not as per the norms laid down by the Centre.

Final instalment

The final instalment of funds recommended by the 13th and 14th Finance Com-

Repay amount spent on Polavaram: A.P.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA

The YSR Congress Party has appealed to the Centre to reimburse the amount spent by the Andhra Pradesh government on construction of the Polavaram project and also release at the earliest the pending grant amount.

Party MPs V. Vijaya Sai Reddy and P.V. Mithun Reddy, in a representation to Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, sought reimbursement of ₹5,103 crore the State had borrowed to spend on construction of the Polavaram project.

missions and the two instalments of the Backward Regions Grant Fund too were pending. The NITI Aayog had recommended grant of ₹19,000 crore for Mission Bhagiratha and ₹5,000 crore for Mission Kakatiya but even these were not released. Holding placards, the TRS MPs later gathered near the Gandhiji statue for the protest.

Producers seek ban on Shane Nigam

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The acrimonious quarrel between actor Shane Nigam and the Kerala Film Producers Association appeared to worsen on Wednesday.

The association has urged the South Indian Film Chamber (SIFC) to deny future roles to Shane till the actor completed the two Malayalam film projects he allegedly left in the lurch after he fell out with the producers. The SIFC is the apex body of Kannada, Malayalam, Tamil and Telugu movie makers.

In effect, the association has backtracked from a compromise brokered by Culture Minister A.K. Balan. Association president M. Renjith told *The Hindu* that Shane had deliberately dashed the possibility of an amicable settlement brokered by Mr. Balan. The actor wilfully "insulted" producers hours after Mr. Balan intervened to cease hostilities.

In a Facebook post, the actor apologised for the remark he made to presspersons on the sidelines of the ongoing International Film Festival of Kerala. "My remark was misinterpreted. Neither I nor the public have forgotten the insinuations against me. I had forgiven the innuendoes. I expect the same response. I believe in God and my organisation. We will all

hopefully proceed on the path of peace together."



Stream near Sabarimala foothills hit by pollution

Study detects high coliform content

HIRAN UNNIKRISHNAN
KOTTAYAM

Taking a dip in the Valiyathodu, a stream that runs through Erumeli, is part of the tradition of the temple town, which hosts lakhs of Sabarimala pilgrims every year.

However, bathing in the waterbody could expose people to faecal coliform, which is several times over the permissible level (500 units). The issue, attributed to the discharge of partially treated sewage from the toilet complexes here, has triggered concerns of a health crisis in the region.

As per a water analysis report prepared by the Kerala State Pollution Control Board (PCB), the faecal coliform bacteria count in the bathing ghat at Valiyathodu was 5,000 units as on November 23.

This volume, according

to officials, has now increased manifold over the last two weeks with the continuing discharge of waste.

The PCB has submitted a report to its member-secretary and the Kottayam District Collector proposing action, including environment compensation cost, against the Travancore Devaswom Board.

"Under-treated waste from the STPs run by the TDB is being discharged into the Valiyathodu, a tributary of the Manimala river. Besides posing health risk to those bathing in it, it also serves as a drinking water source for people in Kottayam, Pathanamthitta and Alappuzha districts," said a senior PCB official.

District Collector P.K. Sudheer Babu said a show cause notice had been issued to the TDB based on the PCB report.

lead author.

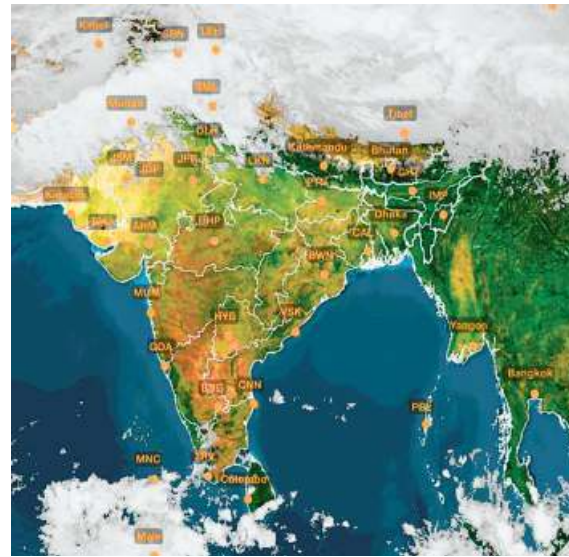
The other authors are Aparna Kolekar, Pallabi Chakraborty from the Nature Conservation Foundation and Vijaya Kumara of the Kuvempu University, Shimogga.

The researchers also recorded 27 incidents of other wildlife species falling into open wells during the same period, including sloth bear, elephant, gaur, sambar chital, muntjac, blackbuck, Bengal fox, mugger and small Indian civet. These incidents resulted in 11 mortalities.

This emerging threat assumes greater importance in the background that the leopard has been recently uplisted from the Near Threatened to Vulnerable by the IUCN Red List.

WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD, POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 18.00 HRS)

Forecast for Thursday: Thunderstorm/hailstorm accompanied with lightning very likely at isolated places over Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand; with lightning very likely at isolated places over Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, west Uttar Pradesh, north Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	26.4	14.0	Kozhikode	.....	34.7	25.2
Ahmedabad	29.5	13.4	Kurnool	.....	31.6	19.8
Aizawl	9.3	.....	Lucknow	.....	24.4	9.5
Allahabad	26.0	11.2	Madurai	.....	29.9	23.7
Bengaluru	27.8	16.5	Mangaluru	.....	36.5	22.9
Bhopal	26.5	12.6	Mumbai	.....	32.5	21.8
Bhubaneswar	31.3	17.2	Mysuru	.....	28.9	17.2
Chandigarh	21.5	8.0	New Delhi	.....	23.2	7.9
Chennai	30.3	22.1	Patna	.....	24.2	12.4
Coimbatore	30.2	20.2	Port Blair	.....	29.9	25.4
Dehradun	23.0	7.9	Puducherry	.....	31.2	20.2
Gangtok	14.7	7.7	Pune	.....	31.2	18.0
Goa	34.0	23.5	Raipur	.....	28.6	15.6
Guwahati	26.4	13.8	Ranchi	.....	25.0	11.6
Hubballi	28.0	18.0	Shillong	.....	14.0	5.1
Hyderabad	28.9	17.5	Shimla	.....	13.3	4.5
Imphal	23.2	8.4	Srinagar	.....	6.4	-1.4
Jaipur	24.3	10.2	Thiruvananthapuram	.....	14.2	32.6
Kochi	32.4	24.6	Tiruchi	.....	31.7	22.0
Kohima	24.4	6.4	Vijayawada	.....	31.0	21.0
Kolkata	28.1	16.4	Visakhapatnam	.....	30.2	23.0

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing					Yesterday	
CITIES	SO ₂	NO ₂	CO	PM2.5	PM10	CODE
Ahmedabad	66	35	11	140	108	.....
Bengaluru	04	55	76	.....	70	.....
Chennai	03	32	24	.....	85	.....
Delhi	14	116	89	.....	471	.....
Hyderabad	17	66	46	.....	195	.....
Kolkata	17	98	25	.....	225	194
Lucknow	28	99	40	.....	451	.....
Mumbai	.....	109	40	.....	237	193
Pune	99	17	54	.....	130	102
Visakhapatnam	13	48	38	.....	44	85

Air Quality Code: ■ Poor ■ Moderate ■ Good (Readings indicate average AQI)
SO₂: Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.
NO₂: Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.
CO: Carbon monoxide. High concentration in air reduces oxygen supply to critical organs like the heart and brain. At very high levels, it can cause dizziness, confusion, unconsciousness and even death.
PM2.5 & PM10: Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease

Heavy metals contaminating India's rivers

Samples from 65% of testing sites unsafe: survey

JACOB KOSHY
NEW DELHI

Samples taken from two-thirds of the water quality stations spanning India's major rivers showed contamination by one or more heavy metals, exceeding safe limits set by the Bureau of Indian Standards.

The findings are part of a report, which is the third edition of an exercise conducted by the Central Water Commission (CWC) from May 2014 to April 2018.

Samples from only one-third of water quality stations were safe. The rest, or 287 (65%) of the 442 sampled, were polluted by heavy metals. Samples from 101 sta-

Pollution check

Instances when metals exceed the threshold value in some key rivers. The threshold value is an averaged index that captures the persistence of pollutants through the year as well as their lethal capacity

River	Chromium	Lead	Iron
Ganga	Exceeds		Exceeds
Yamuna			Exceeds
Brahmaputra			Exceeds
Ramganga		Exceeds	
Rapti	Exceeds		Exceeds
Narmada			Exceeds
Godavari			Exceeds

SOURCE: CENTRAL WATER COMMISSION STUDY

tions had contamination by two metals, six stations saw contamination by three metals.

Iron emerged as the most common contaminant with 156 of the sampled sites re-

gistering levels of the metal above safe limits. None of the sites registered arsenic levels above the safe limit.

The presence of metals in drinking water is to some extent unavoidable and certain

metals, in trace amounts, required for good health. However, when present above safe limits, they are associated with a range of disorders.

Long-term exposure to the above-mentioned heavy metals may result in slowly progressing physical, muscular, and neurological degenerative processes that mimic Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, muscular dystrophy and multiple sclerosis.

20 river basins

The other major contaminants found in the samples were lead, nickel, chromium, cadmium and copper. The study spanned 67 rivers in 20 river basins. Lead, cadmium, nickel, chromium and copper contamination were more common in non-monsoon periods while iron, lead, chromium and copper

exceeded 'tolerance limits' in monsoon periods most of the time. "Arsenic and zinc are the two toxic metals whose concentration was always obtained within the limits throughout the study period," the report noted.

Not all the rivers are equally sampled. Several rivers have only been sampled at a single site whereas others such as the Ganga, the Yamuna and the Godavari are sampled at multiple sites. Marked variation was found in contamination levels depending on the season.

Samples were collected in three different seasons: pre-monsoon, monsoon and post-monsoon.

The main sources of heavy metal pollution are mining, milling, plating and surface finishing industries that discharge a variety of toxic metals into the environment.

IN BRIEF



Shore temple facing severe sea erosion

CHENNAI
The shoreline on the northern side of the Shore Temple in Mamallapuram, Tamil Nadu is facing severe sea erosion. The Public Works Department is awaiting funds to construct groynes for coastal protection at a cost of ₹95.95 crore. According to PWD, every year, nearly 4-5 m of the shoreline near the temple is declining.

ED attaches properties linked to Iqbal Mirchi

NEW DELHI
The Enforcement Directorate has attached properties linked to international drug dealer Iqbal Mirchi, who died in the United Kingdom in 2013. They are currently worth about ₹600 crore. The assets include the third and fourth floors of one Ceejay House and three flats at Worli, an office at Arun Chambers, and three shops at Crawford Market in Mumbai, besides bungalows and land in Lonavala, Maharashtra.

ED conducts searches in Punjab in bank fraud case

NEW DELHI
The Enforcement Directorate on Wednesday conducted searches against a company and its related entities in Chhattisgarh in connection with a bank fraud running into crores. The searches were part of the probe on the basis of an FIR registered by the Central Bureau of Investigation in December 2018. The CBI had lodged the case on a complaint from the Central Bank of India.

Odisha's Rushikulya sees first olive ridley nesting

BERHAMPUR
Marking the first sporadic nesting in the current season, an olive ridley turtle laid 149 eggs on a mass nesting beach at the Rushikulya rookery coast on Tuesday. While the first nesting has occurred on the coast, mass mating of the turtles has already started at sea. On November 2, another olive ridley had laid eggs on the coast, said officials.

CII award for The Hindu Group

'Recognition for Active Customer Engagement'

STAFF REPORTER
CHENNAI

THG Publishing Pvt. Ltd. (The Hindu Group of Publications) received the CII Award for Customer Obsession 2019 for "Recognition for Active Customer Engagement" and "Special Recognition: Leveraging Digital Technologies for Superior Customer Experience" in New Delhi on Wednesday.

Speaking on winning the recognitions, Navaneeth L.V., Chief Executive Officer, The Hindu Group, said, "The journey of excellence is continuous, one that we have been on for 141 years now. Our readers see us as a trusted media house and we have earned this by the values we represent as an organisation. An industry recognition, such as this, comes as a motivation to strive towards furthering our ethos of being a customer-centric brand."

The awards were received by Sridhar Aranala, Vice-President - Sales and Distri-



Sridhar Aranala, VP, Sales and Distribution, second from right, receiving the award on behalf of The Hindu Group.

bution, on behalf of The Hindu Group. On receiving the recognitions, he said, "We are happy to be the recipients of these recognitions from CII. At The Hindu Group, we follow a reader-first principle, and everything revolves around reader-satisfaction. The awards encourage us to make new strides in our journey of service excellence."

The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) deve-

loped a framework and instituted the 'CII Award for Customer Obsession' in 2016 to promote a customer-centric culture among Indian industries. The award aims to recognise customer-centric organisations, where customer is at the centre of all that they do, and helps organisations understand various elements that are critical for delivering superior customer experience across the value chain.

Visva-Bharati University set to shift its weekend

Varsity may shift it to Saturday-Sunday

BISHWANATH GHOSH
SANTINIKETAN

Visva-Bharati, started by Rabindranath Tagore in 1921, is likely to ring in the New Year with a heated debate as the University appears set to shift its weekend from Wednesday-Thursday to Saturday-Sunday.

Several meetings have taken place in the recent months regarding the shift. Though no formal announcement has been made, the change is expected to be effected from the beginning of 2020. "The decision is in the pipeline, though a notification has not been issued yet," Visva-Bharati PRO Anirban Sircar told *The Hindu*.

The shift, if it happens, will mark a major departure from tradition. Santiniketan, in keeping with the Brahma Samaj practice, has always observed Wednesday - and not Sunday - as the weekly holiday. When

Central universities began to have two days off in a week, Visva-Bharati first chose Sunday as the additional day-off before settling for a Wednesday-Thursday weekend.

This is detrimental to its functioning because Visva-Bharati, being the only Centre-run University in West Bengal, is unable to respond promptly to communications it receives mid-week from the Ministry of Human Resource Development and the University Grants Commission.

There are many who see this as an attack on tradition and on Tagore by the Centre. But, a large number of teachers appear to be in support of the idea. "Many teachers have their children studying and spouses working in non-Santiniketan institutions where the weekend is Saturday-Sunday," said Sudipta Bhattacharyya, a professor of economics.

Ban pre-wedding shoots, say Jains, Sindhis in M.P.

STAFF REPORTER
BHOPAL

Jain, Sindhi and Gujarati groups in Bhopal have called for a ban on pre-wedding photoshoots and male choreographers during marriages as they "violate traditions", "rupture relations" and cause "embarrassment to families".

"It's not about the money, but the spread of ob-

scenity," said Bhagwandeve Israni, president, Sindhi Central Panchayat, Bhopal.

Pramod Jain, president, Digambar Jain Panchayat Committee Trust, said, "This is not acceptable to our elders." Though such shoots are not as prevalent in the Gujarati community, they should be pre-empted, said Sanjay Patel, president, Gujarati Samaj.



Strength in numbers

A flawed collegium system is no reason to hold back appointments to the judiciary

The list of alarming numbers and figures relating to the depleting numbers in India's higher judiciary has a new addition. On December 10, the Supreme Court of India said that 213 names recommended for appointment to various High Courts are pending with the government. Data show that 38% of all sanctioned posts for High Court judges are lying vacant as of December 1, with the High Courts of some States including Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan functioning at below half their actual capacity. The court has fixed a time period of six months to appoint as judges at least those whose names the Supreme Court collegium, the High Courts and the Government have agreed upon. At each level of the appointment process of judges to the higher judiciary, prior to the names reaching the Prime Minister and President for final approval, there are time periods specified. The Memorandum of Procedure states that appointments should be initiated at least six months before a vacancy arises and six weeks of time is then specified for the State to send the recommendation to the Union Law Minister, after which the brief is to be sent to the Supreme Court collegium in four weeks. Once the collegium clears the names, the Law Ministry has to put up the recommendation to the Prime Minister in three weeks who will in turn advise the President. Thereafter no time limit is prescribed and the process, seemingly, comes to a standstill.

The Supreme Court's recommendation now of a time limit to these appointments is welcome. It is no secret perhaps, that the equation between the court and the Union Government has been strained by the former's decision to strike down as unconstitutional in 2015 the move to set up a National Judicial Appointments Commission which would have been responsible for appointments and transfers to the higher judiciary in place of the Supreme Court collegium. Since then, reports of delays in appointments have become increasingly commonplace, with both sides testy over procedure. Last week, the same Bench of the Supreme Court chastised the government for not acting on another set of nominations on which the government had sent back objections. If the collegium reiterates the names, the court said, the government has no option but to appoint the judges. Such standoffs are now inevitable. As grievous as it is for the government to disrupt the process through delays, it is for the court to take an increasingly firm hand to ensure that the collegium system that it fought so hard to protect, despite flaws, actually functions effectively. Doing so would be in its best interests. Vacancies in the higher judiciary threaten every aspect of the justice delivery system and it is the courts, and very seldom the government, that always take the blame for any shortfall in justice.

Staggering spread

Governments must do more to increase public awareness of vaccine importance

Even as reported measles cases globally during 2000 to 2018 decreased by 59%, there has been a spike since 2016. Compared with over 1,32,000 reported cases in 2016, the numbers shot up to over 3,53,000 in 2018. While the numbers in 2018 were more than double the previous year, the numbers in 2019 have already surpassed those of 2018. By mid-November 2019, over 4,00,000 cases were reported globally. Since measles surveillance is generally weak, WHO and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention resorted to estimating the number of measles cases and deaths. Based on an updated estimation model, there have been nearly 10 million cases and over 1,42,000 measles deaths in 2018. Last year, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Madagascar, Somalia, and Ukraine accounted for 45% of all reported cases. The situation worsened in Congo by November, with a nearly four-fold increase in cases (from 65,000 in 2018 to 2,50,000 in 2019) and over 5,100 deaths. The situation in Ukraine is grim. After a 50% drop in the number of cases in 2018 compared with 2017, the trend has now reversed - 58,000 cases by mid-November this year, which is 4,000 more than in 2018. There has been a decline in the other three countries mentioned that reported the most number of cases last year.

Vaccine hesitancy has been highlighted for the staggering spread in cases globally. In DR Congo, there is low institutional trust, misinformation, vaccine shortage and even attacks on health-care centres and workers leading to the spread of both measles and Ebola. The Philippines and the small Pacific island of Samoa serve as a textbook case of the sudden emergence of vaccine hesitancy. Mass immunisation using a newly approved dengue vaccine in Philippines, before the risks associated with the vaccine were reported by the manufacturer, shattered public trust in vaccines; so low vaccine coverage led to measles and polio outbreaks. In Samoa, an error in preparing the measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) injection led to the death of two infants. Fear-mongering led to a fall in vaccine uptake, leading to an outbreak of measles. But in many European countries and the U.S., vaccine hesitancy has been on religious grounds and primarily due to anti-vaccination campaigns spreading fake news about vaccine safety. To counter rising hesitancy, about a dozen European countries have already introduced laws making vaccination mandatory. New York City too introduced such a law when the U.S. nearly lost its measles elimination status. Such laws may prove counterproductive in the long run, and the only way to increase vaccine uptake is by educating the public. With 2.3 million children not vaccinated against measles last year, India has much to do to protect its young citizens.

The 'Delhi dogma' fallacy of the right

Minister Jaishankar's rendition of foreign policy is self-congratulatory, critiquing history from the luxury of the present



HAPPY MON JACOB

The 4th Ramnath Goenka Lecture by India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on November 14 was a much-needed master account of India's foreign policy, told in phases, lucid, analytical and comprehensive. Mr. Jaishankar's speech, which reflects a practitioner's hands-on knowledge of India's foreign policy, has, unfortunately, not yet received the critical treatment it deserves. In his speech, the Minister makes a strong pitch to practitioners and analysts to think beyond the "Delhi dogma" that has traditionally defined, and constrained, according to him, the pursuit of India's foreign policy. Though thought-provoking, Mr. Jaishankar's speech is riddled with several empirical and conceptual issues.

Of, and for, the right

To begin with, the speech is a product of a certain messianic presentism of the Indian right that Mr. Jaishankar is a part of. The speech has a heavy self-congratulatory tone aimed at establishing a moral superiority over past governments, as if history began in 2014. To that extent, this is an ideological attempt masquerading as an objective stocktaking of India's foreign policy.

The speech makes the cardinal mistake of critiquing history from the luxury of the present, removed from the temporal constraints that forced the decisions of the past: this is a methodological error. When you fuse a methodological mistake with an ideological attempt at moral

superiority, you get a flawed analysis of the past. While the speech falls short of telling us what the new big ideas of the Narendra Modi government are, it is big on what today's regime thinks went wrong in the past.

One direct result of presentism is the tendency to judge the merit of one's past policies based on current capabilities. To state, for instance, that taking the Kashmir issue to the UN was a mistake assumes that India could have forcibly liberated the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) from the Pakistani invasion during 1947-48. At a point of time when the Indian (and Pakistani) Army was still commanded by British officers, it might not have been possible for India to forcibly get back the rest of J&K. The next best option at the time was indeed to go to the United Nations, which it did.

Need for non-alignment

In the early decades of its existence, India was a militarily weak, recently-decolonised state with an array of domestic political and security challenges, with limited resources, and as a result, attempts at carrying out major military campaigns would have been disastrous. And when faced with the whirlwind of the Cold War, it also, and rightly so, decided to be non-aligned. The policy of non-alignment was hardly woolly-headed; it was largely an exercise in realism. Not only that accommodation by a weak power is not weakness, India also benefitted from both the camps. Would becoming a camp follower have helped India against China in 1962? The answer might lie in the Pakistani experience in 1965 and 1971 despite being an alliance partner of the U.S.

Unwilling to appreciate this complex early journey of a weak power is being ahistorical. Cut to the present. The Minister



dwells at length on India's new appetite for risk-taking, and global positioning. He states that "not all risks are necessarily dramatic; many just require the confident calculations and determined follow up of day-to-day management but their aggregate impact can result in a quantum jump in global positioning. To a certain degree, we see that happening today." Does it mean that India's pre-2014 foreign policy lent it no global standing? Does it also mean that India's global standing, materially and reputationally, has dramatically increased post-2014 especially in the wake of the rather aggressive policies in Kashmir?

Handling China

More so, what has been the track record of the much-fabled strong-willed foreign policy of the Modi regime in dealing with China, easily India's biggest strategic challenge today? Mr. Jaishankar's speech seems unsure on how to deal with it even as he offers a strong critique of the Nehru government's handling of China over six decades ago. Does his government have a China policy "today"? Is avoiding the tactical pressure from China (which can have electoral implications) via informal summits and slow peddling the Quad helpful in addressing the long-term China challenge? If indeed our past failures in dealing with China have reached us where we are today, how can being fixated with past mistakes help us frame a better China policy?

The not-so bright idea of selling the family silver

The Government may not be striking pay dirt in privatising public sector undertakings, especially the profitable BPCL



TRILOCHAN SASTRY

When we examine the proposed stake sale of profit-making public sector undertakings (PSUs), a few strategic issues of national importance need to be considered. The first is an ideological one - that Government must get out of business. The second is the need to bring the fiscal deficit down. The third is a long-term financial one: which option, public- or privately-owned, is better for the Government treasury? A fourth is about national security and self reliance: can India be under pressure if we do not have full control over petroleum? Why do the United States, China and other superpowers have control over their petroleum reserves?

Number crunching

Let us look at the long-term financial issue. The Burmah Shell (Acquisition of Undertakings in India) Act 1976 enabled the Government of India to take ownership by paying ₹27.75 crore. One estimate of that amount in today's terms is to use the inflation factor, which is about 22.42 (between the year

1976 and now). This means that the Government would have paid ₹622.06 crore today. The current market value of Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL) varies between ₹85,000 crore and ₹115,000 crore. The government's share at present is about 53.3% (which it is contemplating selling), that is worth between ₹45,000 crore and ₹61,500 crore. We got the company for a song.

How much has the Government earned meanwhile? Since 2011, the total dividend it has earned is about ₹15,000 crore, which is several times the present value of the investment of ₹622 crore. Let us estimate the present value of all future incomes that the Government would earn. One way is to use inflation and calculate what the value of all future flows would be, based on the present value of all future incomes. The average inflation in the last three years has been 4.5%, 3.6% and 3.48% in 2016, 2017 and 2018, respectively, or an average of 3.86%. If the Government sells its entire stake, it would forego future income of about ₹78,589 crore. In addition the BPCL has also paid taxes of about ₹25,000 crore to the Government since 2011. No doubt the Government will continue to get taxes from the private sector as well. However, the effective tax rate on profits before tax for the BPCL is about 34%, whereas for



the private sector player it is between 25% and 28%. So there will be a loss in tax revenue for the Government after any privatisation.

In summary, financially, we as a nation are worse off by selling such a profitable venture. As the case of the BPCL and several other PSU 'Navratnas' show, they have given super normal returns to the public exchequer. Instead of selling such high performing PSUs, should we not be selling the loss-making ones?

Issue of fiscal deficit target

Another issue underlying the disinvestment is the fiscal deficit target of 3.4%, now reduced to 3.3%. There are many ideological debates among economists about the importance of reducing the fiscal deficit, but we leave that to the experts. Given that revenue collections are not enough, the Government is perhaps planning the sale of well-running PSUs to meet the fiscal deficit target. If the Government does meet its fiscal deficit target by the stake sale of various PSUs including the BPCL this year, how would it meet that target next

The Minister's speech often lacks clarity about what it seeks to advocate. He rightly states, in the context of India not joining the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), that "economic autarky and import substitution" are old dogmas, then goes on to argue, that "embracing the new dogma of globalization without a cost-benefit analysis is equally dangerous". This is just smart phrasing, and one is unsure why India was unable to get a deal from the other partners especially China (despite the Chennai connect) and where India stands on the RCEP now and what are the long-term implications for the Indian economy of not joining it.

Foreign policy of any regime, past or present, should be judged on the basis of concrete outcomes. Even as Mr. Jaishankar offers a spirited critique of the foreign policies of previous governments, his speech points towards very little concrete outcomes achieved by the Bharatiya Janata Party-led governments. He argues that "the balance sheet for India's foreign policy after seven decades presents a mixed picture". Notwithstanding the fact that the history of any country's foreign policy performance "presents a mixed picture", it would have been more useful if the incumbent External Affairs Minister were to clearly articulate the foreign and security policy successes of his government. 'Howdy Modi', 'Chennai Connect' and 'JAI' (Japan-America-India) are hardly spectacular outcomes.

I am in agreement when he argues that dogmas can be problematic because "dogma treats every new approach as an unjustified deviation". However, are we to assume that broad themes and consistency in foreign and security policy are necessarily bad ideas? More so, how would the

bold claims of a strong foreign and security policy sit well with strategic ambiguity, and tactical and reactive posturing?

Or is it that there is another foreign policy dogma in the making today - the so-called Modi doctrine? If so, is undoing past dogma seen as a first step towards promoting the new doctrine? Is that what Mr. Modi's External Affairs Minister has in mind when he says, "The world that awaits us not only calls for fresh thinking, but eventually, a new consensus at home as well. Putting dogmas behind us is a starting point for that journey"?

Kashmir and Pakistan

The biggest disappointment yet is Mr. Jaishankar's articulation of the Modi government's policy towards Kashmir, and Pakistan. He argues that the concerns of critics' about the internationalisation of Kashmir and hyphenation with Pakistan "is thinking from the past, reflecting neither the strength of India, the mood of the nation nor the determination of the Government". Put differently, he seems to argue that the Government's Kashmir policy is brilliant because India can militarily contain the situation in Kashmir, there is domestic widespread support for a militarised solution to Kashmir, and the government does not bother what the international community thinks about it. Not only does this assessment reek of foreign policy arrogance, it hardly sits well with a government that is acutely conscious of promoting the country's glory world over. Let alone the fact that its Kashmir policy is proving to be a disaster.

Happy Mon Jacob teaches at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, and is the author of 'Line on Fire: Ceasefire Violations and India-Pakistan Escalation Dynamics'

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

Arbitrary, anti-secular

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) made a lot of promises in 2014 and 2019. The party said it would create one crore jobs per year, bring back black money and make India a manufacturing powerhouse. Now, keeping aside all such assurances, it is focusing solely on its communal agenda. The Citizenship (Amendment) Bill (CAB) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC) run against the very secular character of the nation and its Constitution. These exercises are neither the demands of the people nor the demands of the situation ("A patently unconstitutional piece of legislation," Dec. 12).

A.G. RAJMOHAN,
Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh

the anti-Muslim attitude of the BJP government. Can the party cite a single reason for not including Muslim refugees in the list of beneficiaries? Moreover, what is the necessity of bringing in such an Act, when there are other pressing concerns like the economy, jobs and crimes against women? The BJP had earlier encroached upon the personal law of Muslims through its Bill criminalising triple talaq. Further, it was not only slow in reacting to crimes against Muslims, its members even felicitated those involved in such crimes. The party's dream of making India a 'Hindu rashtra' is detrimental to the social fabric of the nation.

A. JAINULABDEEN,
Dubai

■ The passage of CAB is a retrograde step and brings

■ The CAB, one of the most discriminatory pieces of legislation in the history of

India, brings the country closer to realising V.D. Savarkar's dream of a Hindu nation. The Bill could make India, de jure, a country for Hindus, killing the spirit of tolerance and diversity our country has so zealously guarded. Home Minister Amit Shah is fulfilling the agenda of the RSS and also making it obvious that his party is only for the believers of Hindutva ideology.

KIRTI WADHAWAN,
Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh

■ It is only a matter of time before the CAB is subject to the scrutiny of courts. The Bill marks another fallout of the brute majority Indian voters have given to the BJP. The gesture of allowing persecuted minorities from neighbouring countries is nothing more than political posturing, at the cost of the idea of India and its constitutional morality. Many

more such moves could be on the table of the government's de facto Number 2, perhaps designed to make stateless non-BJP voters. A question that arises is: are we now even qualified to label Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh as "theocratic states"?

ROHAN RATHI,
New Delhi

Fathers of Partition

The claim of the Home Minister that it was Congress that was responsible for Partition is false. The theory of Partition goes back to 1887 when Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, founder of the Aligarh Muslim University, declared that Hindus and Muslims belong to two different nations. It was in 1933 that Choudhry Rahmat Ali, a scholar at the University of Cambridge, coined the word 'Pakistan'. Mohammad Ali Jinnah devoted the last two

decades of his life to realise his dream of an independent Pakistan. That the Pakistan that emerged in 1947 was a mere shadow of what he had wanted is a different story. "We will either have a divided India or a destroyed India," thundered Jinnah on the Direct Action Day. At the other end of the spectrum was Savarkar who held that India was not a "Unitarian and homogeneous nation, but on the contrary... two nations in the main, the Hindus and the Muslims".

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A fallen idol

The report that Nobel Peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi will defend Myanmar in the International Court of Justice (World page, Dec. 11) comes as a great irony, considering that she was once an acclaimed champion of democratic aspirations in her

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country who was imprisoned by a highly repressive regime for more than a decade. It is a sad, paradoxical reality that an individual who once had fought boldly and non-violently against her nation's military rulers is today defending the same regime, which is alleged to have committed genocidal acts against some minority populations of her country. The free-thinking world would surely any day wish to see the outspoken Ms. Suu Kyi of the past rather than the silent Mr. Suu Kyi of the present who, for reasons best known to her, has now fully compromised on her lofty principles of upholding peace, democracy and human rights of all, across the world.

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